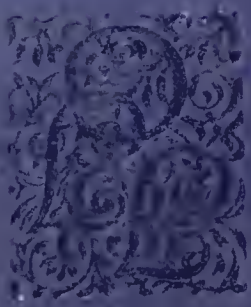

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THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF "THE EXPOSITORY TIMES" "THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE"
"THE DICTIONARY OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPELS" AND
"THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS"

DEUTERONOMY—ESTHER

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Remember all the Way.

Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.—Deut. viii. 2.

The Book of Deuteronomy might very well be called a book of remembrance. It was written much later than the time when the events recorded in it occurred; and it was written to bring the people to remembrance in a time of calamity and apostasy. The aim of the writer was to show the nation what great things the Lord had done for them in the days gone by, and, by stirring them in this way to gratitude, to stir them to nobler and higher service of the God whom many of them had forsaken. And, of course, the theme of the book is the theme of many of the other books of the Bible. God is constantly calling His people to recollection—to think of the past, to realize what has been done, and out of the past to gather lessons of inspiration and hope for the future.

I.

Remember.

1. Memory is at once the condition and the proof of our self-identity. We should not know ourselves in any real sense had we not power to recall the past. Apart from memory, our minds would be a blank, except to the sensation of the passing moment. Knowledge, mental growth, even thought itself would be impossible. But as we are constituted, each experience as it goes leaves its sediment in the mind, and is unified in the process with all that has been and is capable of being revived in the form of an image when the impression itself has ceased. This seems a very simple fact, yet it is one that lies at the root of all our

mental and spiritual life. By means of it the past lives on in the present; by means of it the far-off is brought near, and made a part of our conscious life here and now; by means of it we can reproduce our former experiences and converse with the ghosts of what we were ten, twenty years ago; by means of it we can call up the slowly vanishing image of the friends who have long since passed away from the stage of life. More, without this faculty we could not come into touch with God Himself—Him in whom are the all-knowing mind and the fadeless memory—and our highest spiritual exercise, next to present fellowship with Him, is to "utter the memory of his great goodness and sing of his righteousness."

¶ Tell me what things you can remember easily, and I will tell you what manner of man you are; whether you are cultured or coarse, scholarly or vulgar, healthy-minded or morbid. The humorist has a mind stored with jokes and anecdotes, the philosopher can recall a complicated train of reasoning without an effort, the cheerful man remembers his holidays and his joys, the melancholy his trials and bereavements and losses. And so it runs through the complicated varieties of human temperament and character.[1]

2. According to the teaching of most of the people who wrote the books of the Bible, memory is a gift of God—a gift to be used especially for spiritual purposes. Nearly the whole of a man's spiritual life rests upon some foundation of memory; he naturally and inevitably goes back to this first source of his spiritual inspiration, to those first moments of spiritual consciousness, to those days when the truth of God was more vivid than it is now, to those springs of the religious life which can be traced slowly back, as the source of a great river can be traced to the spring on the mountain-side. It is in this direction and for reasons of this kind that the religious life with some people is so vivid and so clear; and it may be clear and vivid with every one of us if we will use this discipline of memory which God has put into our hands.

¶ There is a remarkable passage at the close of Augustine's *Confessions*, in which he searches his mind for the root of his knowledge of God, and he finds it chiefly in his memory. "I come," he says, ". . . to the fields and spreading courts of

[1] E. Griffith-Jones.

memory, where are treasures of unnumbered impressions of every kind. . . . For there the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is, which I have been able to discern by sense, are ready to my hand. . . . There, also, I meet with myself and I remember myself, what I did, and when, and where, and in what way, when I did it, I was attracted by it. . . . A great amazement fills me when I think of this; surprise astounds me. And men travel to enjoy the heights of the mountains, and the mighty billows of the sea, and the wide tides of the rivers, and the expanse of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and leave themselves behind, and feel no wonder that though I speak of these things I do not see them with my eyes; and yet I could not speak of them did I not see them in my memory, in those spaces so vast, mountains and billows, and rivers and stars, which I have seen, and ocean, of which I have heard, as though I were looking at them without. . . . So great is the power of memory, so great the power of life in mortal man. What shall I do then, O, Thou my true life, my God? I will pass even through and beyond this power of mine which is called memory; yea, I will pass beyond it [O, Thou who madest all things contained in memory, and the memory itself that contains them] that I may attain unto Thee, O sweet Light, who shinest through all things." In this fine passage we have a faithful record of what passes through every devout mind. In the cavernous recesses of memory, as well as in the vast universe outside, dwells the Divine Spirit, and if we cannot find Him in that inner chamber, it will do us little good to find Him elsewhere."

3. The Book of Deuteronomy is full of suggestions about the use of memory; about the kind of things we ought to remember, and the purpose for which we ought to remember them. Let us refer to some of these texts in succession, and let us see what suggestions they have for our life. One of them is the present text, which will thereafter be taken up by itself and treated fully.

(1) "Remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt" (Deut. xvi. 3).

The day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt. What day was that? It was the birthday of the nation. To remember it meant to print upon the heart the sense of an original and inexpressible debt to God. It was God who had brought Israel out of Egypt. It was He who did it by His great power and outstretched arm. It was He who made a way for

them through the sea; He who had overwhelmed their enemies in its depths. Whatever Israel might forget, they were never to forget that great event which gave them birth as a nation. They were never to escape from beneath the impression of it; never to lose the sense of their immeasurable debt to God.

What day is that for us?

What strictly answers to it is the day when God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ first shone out before our eyes, and took possession of our hearts. That is the day when we came out of the land of Egypt. But is it a day in the calendar? Is it a day that everybody can date? There are people like St. Paul who always remember that day on the road to Damascus. And though John Wesley remembers the very spot and the very hour, "nine o'clock at night in the Moravian Meeting House in Fetter Lane," when the light of the Gospel of the glory of God shone into his heart, and he knew that there was instant, full, and free salvation in Jesus Christ for every man, yet it is quite possible that many Christians should be just as unconscious of the time of their spiritual birth as of their natural birth.

But it is never possible for the Church to remain a Church if it forgets the time when God brought it out of the house of bondage. The day in the life of the Church that answers to this is that mighty act of God to which we look back, just as Israel looked back to the Red Sea; that mighty act of God which includes the presence of Christ in the world, and His death, and resurrection, and ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. If we are to remain Christians at all, if we are to have the character of God's people in us, our life must always remain under the impression of that great theme. To realize what it means that Jesus Christ lived in this world, lived our life, died our death, ascended to the Father, and poured out the gift of His Spirit, to realize that is to realize what a Christian means when he uses the word "God."

(2) "Remember, forget thou not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness" (Deut. ix. 7).

In the life of Israel there were days that were eminent in evil. These forty years that had been passed in the wilderness might in some respects seem very monotonous. One year and

one day were only too painfully like another, but there were days eminent in badness, days when they had done monumental deeds of wickedness, things that provoked God to anger; days of rebellion; days of mutiny; days of distrust, when they challenged God; days of degrading sensuality. What hideous recollections some of these were!

And is there not something corresponding to them in the life of every man? You cannot date your conversion, perhaps, but you can remember the very day when you gave way to anger and hatred, to envy, to profanity, to sensuality, to some kind of evil passion that provoked the wrath of God. There are acts of sin that have a kind of evil prominence even in our bad lives, and God says to us, "Remember these: remember how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness."

Why should we remember things like that? They are to be remembered, for one thing, that we may understand the long-suffering of God, and praise Him for it. There is nothing more wonderful in God than the way in which He bears with us. His long-suffering sustains the provocation of our iniquities, and gives us new opportunities again and again; is not wearied with receiving our penitence, and multiplies His own marvel. And we need to remember those things that we ourselves may grow in penitence. A man does not repent and then be done with it. Repentance is not like the payment of a debt that we pay and then it is over. Repentance is a habit of daily virtue. Repentance is not something that is extinguished by forgiveness. Repentance is something that is begotten by forgiveness. Repentance is something that goes on, ever deepened and purified and made more powerful just by the prolonged experience of the pardoning love of God. And we need to remember these things also, that they may teach us to abstain from hasty judgments of others. How inconsiderate people can be in spite of their need of consideration! If we remember how we did provoke the Lord our God in the wilderness, then we will not be so harsh and peremptory with the man who needs patience from us.

(3) "Remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness" (Deut. viii. 2).

It is taken for granted that our life here is under the provi-

dence and guidance of God. "The Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness." Now providence is difficult to prove except to a man who has learned to believe in redemption. The Christian doctrine of providence is not something antecedent to redemption; the Christian doctrine of providence is an inference from redemption. You must know God's love at the place where it is hardest of all to believe in it, or else you will never be able to believe in it anywhere at all. You have an illustration of this in an ordinary family. When everything goes pleasantly, a boy hardly knows what it means when he is told his father loves him. He gets his regular meals; he gets clothes; he gets shelter; he gets education—of course he does (that is what he thinks)—why should not he? But if the boy were ill, dangerously ill, ill to the point of death, and he saw his father abandon everything to think of him, then it would come home to him that the love of his father was a real thing. And after that it would be credible to him, and he would understand, that the love of his father covered all his life, even in what had once seemed indifferent things; even in what once seemed perverse and cross and untoward things; he would understand that his father's affection might even in these be seeking his good. It is just like that with providence. A man cannot believe in providence unless providence is an inference from the Cross. And you will notice that that is the way it is put in the New Testament. St. Paul says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Who know? We Christians know. We who have stood beside the Cross of Christ, and have seen the love of God there come to us in our extremity, identify itself with us in our guilt and misery and despair, take all our burden on itself and lift us up; we who have that assurance of God's love can see the light of it fall on all our life, and know that God is everywhere making it all contribute to our good. Those who can say, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," can say, "Shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

We ought to recall our life and to recall it in this way—as the demonstration of God's omnipresent, fatherly, providential care. We should have an autobiography in our minds, if not on paper, of the influences, and especially the personal influences, which

have entered into our lives. We should recall the occasion when we met our best friend, or when we encountered the successful rival who snatched some prize from our hand, because that is in God's providence too. We should remember the time when we came across the book that opened a new world to us. We should remember the purposes that have been crossed, the hopes that have been frustrated, the aspirations that have been fulfilled, or that have not been fulfilled, and think to what all that has led in the providence of God. Nothing is more certain, whenever we begin to look back upon our life, than what the prophet Jeremiah says—"O Lord, . . . it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." It is not we who have made our life what it is. It is not we; it is God.

(4) "Remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deut. viii. 18).

The tendency of success is to make us forget God. The Psalms are full of that teaching, and so are the words of our Lord. Prosperity engenders the feeling that we are equal to anything. The rich man's wealth, as Solomon says, is his strong city. He entrenches himself in it, he fortifies himself in it, he feels secure in it. He is secure against chance, secure against accidents, secure against any reasonable or unreasonable kind of bad fortune, secure against Providence, secure against God. His very sense of being independent overleaps itself, and falls, before he knows it, into a kind of practical atheism. Well, here is a direction for the use of memory by prosperous and successful men. "Remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." It is only when we remember God that the getting of wealth ceases to be an end in itself. It is only when we remember God that the sense of responsibility attaches to success and to the possession of wealth.

The man who is making money almost unconsciously begins to feel as if he were independent. Of course there is a legitimate sense in which independence is to be aimed at. Burns speaks of "the glorious privilege of being independent." But how little, when we think of it, can independence really amount to! The most prosperous man is not independent of his neighbours, of his servants, of the forces of nature; and still less is he independent of God.

(5) "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way" (Deut. xxv. 17).

"By the way." Amalek had followed on the rear of Israel and cut off the stragglers, and shown every kind of inhumanity to the defenceless people. So what this suggestion means is something like this: life abounds in illustrations of human character, even of inhumanity; as we live and come through things we see what men are capable of, and we are not to forget it; it is to be remembered, not for vengeance, but for wisdom.

Now, perhaps that may seem an uncharitable, an unchristian counsel to some, but it is not really so. Have you noticed how often our Lord says, "Beware of men"? There are persons and institutions that have shown their character, and are not to be trusted any more. They are thoroughly, and consistently, and in principle bad, and we should be false to what experience can teach if we forgot that and trusted them again. We know that there are institutions and movements which in the very soul of them are powers of darkness and of bondage, and can never be anything else, and that the Lord will have war with them from generation to generation. And it is not uncharitable to remember that, and to hold no terms with them. It is just gathering the heart of wisdom that God means us, by our experience, to get.[1]

II.

Remember all the Way.

1. The circumstances under which this exhortation was delivered were solemnly impressive. It was the speaker's purpose to hearten the people for the future by an appeal to the past; he grounded faith and hope in experience. Glancing at the chapter which follows, we see that he does not allow his hearers to harbour any illusions as to what is about to be required of them. They are to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than themselves; a people great and tall, of whom it had been said, Who can stand against the sons of Anak? It is to nerve and animate them for this momentous and critical enterprise that he rehearses in their ears the experiences of the days gone by.

[1] J. Denney.

The great leader of Israel in this memorial service made the memories of history sacramental. Thou shalt remember, he said; and he forced it upon the worst man there, the man of narrowest and meanest intellect, the man of most selfish character, that he, too, had been hedged about with divinity, and that, however he might have rough-hewn them, an overpowering Providence had shaped his ends. Somehow he had to make valiant men, heroes, knights, out of tribes of craven and mean-spirited people, and infuse into a servile and pusillanimous host the spirit of conquerors. And he did it by these means. He read them chapters from their past, elucidated and interpreted them, until God's will, God's hand, God's presence became so manifest that the dullest laggard among them must have felt the lift of a great destiny. "Thou shalt remember."

¶ A greater than Moses spake, to no multitude of hearers, but to a mere handful of disciples, and said to them, "This do in remembrance of me." For did He not know that all things were possible to be endured and achieved, suffered and accomplished, to those who brooded over His life and death and love, until they read the very soul and substance of His work and person—to those who kept ever before them the glad, yet awful, memory of the Cross?[1]

¶ There was once, so the story says, a poor musician in Germany who loved a maiden of high degree, and in order to win her went away to distant lands and strove to obtain money and fame. When at last he had obtained both he came back and claimed his bride. They were walking out one evening by the side of the river, and he sought to reach a tuft of little blue flowers for her. In doing so his foot slipped and he fell into the river Rhine; and the story says that, as he was being carried away by the strong current, he flung the bunch of blue flowers to land, crying as he did so, "Forget me not." From that time, and from this story, the little blue flower, known before as the "Mouse's Ear," has been known in Europe everywhere as the "Forget-me-not." It is a much prettier name than the other, and no man has a sweeter memorial raised to him than that poor drowning musician has in the sweet little flowers that make the face of the earth so beautiful for us year by year.[2]

2. Let us emphasize the "all." "Remember *all* the way." Remember only one part of the way, and then not only the

[1] C. S. Horne. [2] J. M. Gibbon.

whole, but even that particular portion, will inevitably be misunderstood. Take it all together. The very principle of it implies a wholeness, a continuity of purpose, which can only be fully comprehended in the result. No way explains itself at every step. It bends hither and thither, now on the right hand, now on the left; now it ascends, now it descends, obedient to necessities which only he who stands on a lofty vantage-ground can understand. The man who made it took that wide masterly survey. He saw the starting-point and the end, and their best possible junction; and we travel in faith daily, hourly, along the highways of this world, believing that wise men made them; that difficulties were patent to their eye that are hidden from ours; and that on the whole they have chosen for us the best way to the end. And we believe that a Being of unerring wisdom laid the plan of our life-course; that He led it not through weary wastes without a clear insight into the nature and conditions of our journey, and the certainty that that was the best way to our home. We believe that a Father's wise and loving eye has surveyed the whole of it; and that not a quagmire, not a perilous passage, not a torrent, not a mountain gorge, not a steep, rocky path, not a bare, sandy plain, has been ordained that could have been spared. Thou shalt consider *all* the way.

> The Alpine peasant in his lonely glen,
> Who sees the sudden lake formed at its head
> Burst all at once its icy barrier,
> And sweep his village from its perilous ledge;
> Or hears the avalanche roar down the heights,
> A cataract of snow, whose very breath
> The stoutest pine-tree snaps like brittle reed,
> Scattering destruction in its awful path,
> And burying home and field in one white grave;
> His vision bounded by his narrow hills—
> His sense impressed by his own loss alone—
> Imagines that these evils are the work
> Of some dread Power, that loves but to destroy.
> But we who live beneath more spacious skies,
> And take a wider survey of the world,
> See in these evils but the needful links
> In a vast scheme, by which the parched earth
> Is watered and the treasures of the snow,
> For ever melted and renewed, are borne,

With most beneficent economy,
Down from their storehouse on the lofty peaks,
To give prosperity and wealth to realms
That otherwise would have been barren wastes.
And so the sorrows that o'erwhelm our lot
And chill our hearts, which, in the narrow space
Of their own dark horizon, we are apt
To view with terror, as the wanton sport
Of some malicious fate that seeks our hurt;
Viewed from a loftier vantage-ground of faith,
With wider outlook of experience,
Are seen to be but transient incidents
In a great plan of loving-kindness, meant
To make our whole life richer and more blest,
And spread the fruitage of a heavenly love
O'er deserts useless both to God and man.
Beyond those hills that our horizon bound,
And hem us in and darken all our sky,
Stretch the fair lands which these white realms make green,—
The watered gardens, whose serener heavens
Through distant storms have gained a purer blue.
Why should a living man complain, whose life
Transcends the limit of all mortal woe,
And ranges far beyond, where absolute
And everlasting compensations are![1]

(1) Remember the *Sins* of the way. There are times when it is profitable to revive the memories of forgotten sins; to exhume the carcases, or, rather, read out the fading inscriptions on the headstones of the graves, of self-will, folly, or lust. Generally it is wholesome advice to "let the dead past bury its dead." Morbid natures, brooding over the memories of sins, beget the appetite for fresh ones. The past is best buried under a nobler present, for

I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

But that the present may be nobler, let the sins of the past, with their attendant sorrows, sometimes come into remembrance, if only to magnify the patience and long-suffering of God.

The sins of the way are sometimes remembered whether we

[1] Hugh Macmillan, *The Christmas Rose*, 7.

will or not, for memory is only partially under our control. It has laws of its own, which run their course in spite of us. If we could always forget what we wanted to forget, and remember only what we desired to remember, we should find life very much simplified. There would be no sense of guilt, no remorse, no passionate and vain longing to get rid of the ghosts of the past. The murderer, the thief, the repentant prodigal would in that case be haunted by no disquieting dreams. But God could not entrust us with such a power over our own past. And so He has given conscience a memory independent of our will.

¶ Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were the victims of this inability to forget; he, by day, in his waking moments, she, at night, in dreams and nightmares, were pursued by the undying ghost of Banquo, which was but the objectified image of their own conscience, as it drove its shadowy sword into their inmost hearts till he cried: "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" and she wandered about in her sleep, striving in vain to wipe the blood-spot from her hand. This involuntary ethical memory is one of the safeguards of virtue, one of the restraints of vice.

(2) But let the memory be also of the *Forgiveness* of sin. For it is not enough that our present life be renewed, while the ugly past remains as it was. God's salvation must stretch its redeeming hand over our past as well. He must give us the powers which will purify the secret place where the vanished joys as well as the undying sorrows of the days of old are stored up. Heaven would be no heaven to us if we were to be at the mercy of our past.

¶ Those who know Dante will remember how, when he came into the last circle of Purgatory on his way heavenward, he was taken to the brink of two rivers, and given their waters to drink. The first was Lethe, a draught from which cleared the memory of all its stains and scars, its shadows and its corruptions. The second was Eunoe, whose waters brought back to the mind all the happy, soul-lifting recollections of bygone days. With profound insight into the deepest facts of our nature, the great poet there teaches us that God's last, best gift—the key to the soul's true heaven—is a regenerated memory. But where shall we find the true Lethe and Eunoe of the soul? God in His infinite mercy has provided us with them. God's Lethe is His forgiving love. It flows, sweet and vivifying, from beneath the Cross of our Redeemer. And those who drink of these healing waters are

relieved from the incubus of their evil past. Not by forgetting, but by transfiguring the mistakes and failures and sins of the days of old, does this heavenly secret of forgiveness do its blessed work for the soul. It transmutes the torment of memory into an undying gratitude to Him who has redeemed us by His precious blood, and has enabled us to see in our worst sins the memorials of an Almighty and ever-potent redemption. And Eunoe? What is this but the certainty of God's gracious leadership and kindly discipline? When once we realize how that Hand has led us, and preserved us, and kept us till now, how life's strength has flowed from His sustaining grace, how He has peopled every day with the memorials of His love—then how brightly do even the sorrows of the past shine as we gaze down the chequered vista of our experience! Deeply had the writer of Deuteronomy drunk of these sweet waters of Eunoe. The book is a psalm of grateful praise for the remembered mercies of the days of old. "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no."[1]

There were many burning hours on the heart-sweet tide,
And we passed away from ourselves, forgetting all
The immortal moods that faded, the god who died,
Hastening away to the King on a distant call.

There were ruby dews shed when the heart was riven,
And passionate pleading and prayers to the dead we had wronged;
And we passed away, unremembering and unforgiven,
Hastening away to the King for the peace we longed.

Love unremembered and heart-ache we left behind,
We forsook them, unheeding, hastening away in our flight;
We knew the hearts we had wronged of old we would find
When we came to the fold of the King for rest in the night.[2]

(3) Remember the *Happiness* of the way as well as the sorrow. We do not take half joy enough, the joy which we have a right to take, in the goodly world which our God hath built and adorned for us, in the wonderful and beautiful work which is spread round us with unsparing hand, and which an angel might

[1] E. Griffith-Jones. [2] A. E., *The Divine Vision*, 8.

stop to gaze on with rapture. Poor we may be and struggling, and all the higher interests and joys of life—art, literature, music —may be tasted but rarely, and in drops. But the Great Artist has taken thought for the poor. He wills that their joys shall not be scant. The beauty, the glory, which Art at its highest faintly adumbrates, is theirs in profusion. Each moment they have within easy reach works of His hand whose far-off image, reproduced by man, the rich of this world would buy at untold cost.

There are those who indulge in the morbid memory. They live among the sorrows of the past and haunt its graves. They are familiar with the great illnesses and minor ailments of their lives, and date every event by some misfortune that happened in the same year or week. There is nothing they love more than to tell us in circumstantial detail of all the unpleasant, terrible, tragic things that have happened since last we met. Their memory is like a vault. Happy are those whose memory is like that old sundial in Italy—of which Hazlitt writes so finely—inscribed with the motto, "I record only the sunny hours," and who, in thinking of the days gone by, try to preserve only the brighter, kindlier, vitalizing treasures of experience.

¶ A few days before sailing for England from America I went to see a blind man who had been among the veterans of Pittsburg, and who had the medal given by his nation for valour in the field. I looked upon him with emotion, for he had been a gallant soldier and a devoted patriot. I said to him, "What do you do in these days of darkness?" and his reply was, "Thank God, doctor, for fifty years I had my sight, and I was permitted to see Abraham Lincoln, and I heard the bugles call men to the fight for freedom and for truth, and I now go back to those scenes while shut in this walled darkness and bring them before me in stately procession, and throw around them my imaginative powers, and so the hours of dulness and despair are kept at a distance. When I lost my sight I gained new powers of memory."[1]

¶ There is a description which I have never forgotten, in one of Robert Louis Stevenson's fascinating books of travel, of the impression produced upon his mind by listening to the wail of the *Miserere* in a Continental cathedral. "I take it," he said, "to be the composition of an atheist." The verdict is severe, but I am bound to think it just. At any rate, the deliberate rehearsal of

[1] S. Parkes Cadman.

all the miseries and agonies of men must inevitably cultivate in them the feeling of self-pity, with an underlying insinuation, I should say, that they have been hardly used, and that life is a dismal matter at the best. So far as we can understand the situation, the Hebrews, the people to whom Moses spoke, had very generally become infected with the temper and spirit of self-pity.[1]

¶ In *The Glasgow Herald* of 6th May 1911 there appeared a sketch entitled "An East Coast Fishwife," by E. A. G. K., from which the following is taken: "It must have been a hard, busy life all those years. Would you care to go through it all again?" I asked. She looked thoughtfully at me for a moment. "Aye, wad I, frae the very beginning. I've had health and strength, a gude faither an' mither, an' a kind man. Jamie and me had aye muckle tae be thankfu' for. Gin the day's wark was lang, we had oor ain fireside, and oor rest at nicht; and the bairns had a' dune weel. I wadna want ony o't. Whiles when I'm sittin' yonder daein' ma bit shoòin'—for I can see fine tae shoò yet—I jist see them a' afore me, leevin and deid, wee bairnies an' auld folk, and I aye think the Almichty is won'erfu' kind in gie'n' auld folk the power o' mindin' a' the pleesures they hae had, and the lang road they have traivelt, an' the folk they have kent. Gin ye hae a lang life, ye hae mony memories; an' I wadna pairt wi' ony o' mine."

III.

Remember the Leading of God.

The Israelites had been *led* through the wilderness. This was the great fact of their journey. And it is this fact beyond all others that they are now commanded to remember. Thou shalt remember all the way because it is the way by which the Lord thy God has *led* thee.

1. Was God the leader of Israel only? He who leadeth out the stars as a shepherd leadeth his flock is the sovereign leader of all the nations. He is the King of all the earth. The harps of psalmists and the lyres of prophets sounded forth the glorious truth that God is the God of all mankind, and that, even if they acknowledge Him not, He is guiding them, and He is controlling their affairs. And when St. Paul, standing on Mars' Hill, declared how God had to do with the seats and settlements of the

[1] C. S. Horne.

nations, he struck a blow at the polytheism of the time with its localized divinities, and also a blow at the narrow conception of God and His ways which some professing Christians are not ashamed to entertain. But if God be the God of nations, He is also the guide and leader of all those movements which from time to time have sprung up in the breasts of nations, having the elevation and the advance of mankind for their aim and their design. Surely we cannot exclude God from these! The chief of them undoubtedly is Christianity, because it had a Divine Person as its founder, and because it united in itself the sublimest revelations of God with the noblest duties pertaining to man. But alongside of Christianity, and oftentimes by means of contact with it, there have been great movements originated and carried forward, and in every one of them are to be found the presence and the power of God. We can hardly imagine a greater affront to Divine Majesty than to deny this—to suppose that there can be goodness without Him; to suppose that there can be blessedness without His blessing; to suppose that there can be rays of light, cheering the condition of man, which have not proceeded from God, the Father of lights.

¶ In the year 1836, and in the month of January, devout men met in the city of Boston (United States) to consider what could be done to stay the ravages of intemperance in that country. They met in a house of prayer, and, having met, they prayed, deliberated, decided, and they also acted. They formed in February "The American Society for the Promotion of Temperance." They did this in order that they might, as it were, give vent to a cry of anguish at the appalling evils that had come upon a Christian and civilized land from one direct and removable agency; and they did it as a protest against that great neglect which had been allowed to continue for so many years—a neglect chargeable both upon the Churches and upon the State. And who gave this inspiration to these men? Was it not God? Did He not breathe into their souls of His own Spirit to move them in this enterprise? Did He not give them the pity they felt and their earnest resolve to action? Did not He Himself take the command of the movement? Was He not at the heart of it? Was He not in the very front of it? And has not that been the place that He has occupied from that time down to the present hour?[1]

[1] Dawson Burns.

2. Is the way we have travelled the way the Lord has led us? That is the great question. We have to confess, some of us, that it is not. It has been our own way; we have mapped it out for ourselves, and we have been proud of the achievement. We have said, "My own wits and the might of my own hands have gotten me this wealth," have felt that we were self-sufficient men and women, and that we were not dependent on any. There are people who like to forget God's leadership, and in life as we know it in these days the sense of God's presence is very hard to keep before us, and very easily let slip. But life on any other terms than by God's guidance is a very unsatisfactory business at the best, and it is good for us to remember that the Lord our God is leading us, sometimes even when we are least conscious of it. Religion simply means the guiding of God in history and in the individual life. We want to get back to that old doctrine which is sometimes wrongly called the Puritan doctrine, the doctrine of Providence—that behind the things we can see, and touch, and handle there is the will of God; that, hidden from our mortal eyes, but present to our spiritual sense, there is the fact of God caring and leading; that behind this personal will of ours there is another Will directing us, and that in this life there is a purpose being fulfilled, a purpose for which the Divine Will alone is responsible.

God leads me!
Through all the old unquiet years,
Shadowed by failure and by sin,
When selfish grief and selfish fears
Made all the way I stumbled in
A mystery of darkness—still
I think He led me. Looking back
It seems to me His Blessed Will
Fashioned my life, and any lack
Of presence or of riches or of power
Were angels in disguise.
However much I hungered for
A present earthly paradise,
God held me![1]

3. Do we recognize the Providence of God as we journey, or is it only in the memory and at a distance that we can see the

[1] J. W. Taylor, *The Doorkeeper*, 9.

love that has led us? It is a fact that in the spiritual sense we are, almost all of us, long-sighted; we see the things at a distance more clearly and truly than the things that are right upon us. There is little or nothing Divine to us in this poor, mean, commonplace existence of ours as we are passing through it. It is as one has seen the waters round a steamer in mid-ocean dull and drab; but away in the wake the waves, flecked with foam, have taken the colouring of the sunset, and put on an ethereal radiance. Memory is the eye through which we see our past life in the light of God's love. We need distance for the perspective; we do not see things true till we have moved a little stage away. Then we observe, of our halting-places, as the patriarch of his, "Verily God was in this place and I knew it not." God was in this sorrow, this success, this separation, this reunion, this failure, this conquest. While my spirit slept and I knew nothing but that my pillow was a stone, and the way of life was hard and sore to travel, the Lord was in this place, and the impulses and forces of my pilgrimage were verily the hand of God. There is no discovery like that to put soul into the hesitating or misgiving or despairing.

There is a death of memory that is brought
Not by oblivion, but by coming light.
It fades as childhood fades in manhood's thought,
It dies as starlight dies at morning's sight,
Not needing things behind.

May this forgetfulness, my heart, be thine;
Not the great deadness of an outgrown sorrow,
But the deep trust that ceases to repine,
Since yesterday shall come again to-morrow,
Bearing the things behind.

Fields of the past to thee shall be no more
The burial-ground of friendships once in bloom,
But seed-plots of a harvest on before,
And prophecies of life with larger room
For things that are behind.

Live thou in God, and thy dead past shall be
Alive for ever with eternal day;
And planted on His bosom thou shalt see
The flowers revived that withered on the way
Amid the things behind.

4. Do we observe that God keeps moving obstacles out of our way as we go? "Speak unto the children of Israel that they *go forward*"—that is our duty: the rest is God's. And as we go, the threatening waters divide.

¶ In Switzerland you see sometimes an immense mass of ice and snow detached from the top of a mountain, and as it comes thundering down it seems as if it would overwhelm the whole valley. But it strikes first on one point, then on another. It is shattered into a million pieces, and instead of crushing the traveller, the dust of it simply cools his forehead. It is ofttimes like that in life. Many a time do we look and think that something is going to crush us and overwhelm us; but the Master, with His wonderful skill, turns the disaster away, and we suffer no evil. The thing that we feared is to us an inspiration and a refreshment.

¶ A gentleman told me some time ago that he was driving into Lincoln. He had a farm a few miles out, and those of you who know Lincoln will know how the Cathedral from that particular point of view seems to block up the high road. The gentleman was driving with his little boy, and the little fellow looked piteously at this obstacle, and at last he burst into tears, and said, "Oh! father, how are we going to get over that?" But it was all right; the father drove on, and they had the sight of the lovely Minster—that was all.[1]

5. And do we observe how often He turns apparent evil into good? Have no significant dates, no critical junctures, no days of darkness lifted themselves along our track through life? Have we come across no oasis and spot of verdure where we thought we should like to abide awhile, but which we had to leave? Can we recall no day of astonishment and of trembling, of paleness and fear, when the knees were weak, and the heart melted like wax? Has nothing happened in our life which has put forth a controlling influence, shaped our course, and made us largely what we are? Do we see the way by which we have come? Do we see where we made a profound, irremediable mistake? Do we see, too, how that something else in us which erred was overruled and compounded for the best, so that we did not suffer so much damage as should naturally have occurred? Do we recall our happy hits, right choices, successful moves, and also the slough of despond in which we have been mired and the

[1] W. L. Watkinson.

angry seas upon which we have been tossed and the dark entries through which we have groped our uncertain way?

¶ I was sailing down the St. John River, Canada, which is the Rhine and the Hudson commingled in one scene of beauty and grandeur, and while I was on the deck of the steamer a gentleman pointed out to me the places of interest, and he said, "All this is *interval land*, and it is the richest land in all the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia." "What," said I, "do you mean by interval land?" "Well," he said, "this land is submerged for a part of the year; spring freshets come down, and all these plains are overflowed with the water; the water leaves a rich deposit, and when the waters are gone the crop springs up, and there is the grandest harvest that was ever reaped." And I instantly thought, "It is not the heights of the Church and it is not the heights of this world that are the scene of the greatest prosperity; it is the soul over which the floods of sorrow have gone, the soul over which the freshets of tribulation have torn their way, that yields the greatest fruits of righteousness, and the largest harvest for time, and the richest harvest for eternity." Bless God that your soul is interval land.[1]

All around I heard the whispering larches
  Swinging to the low-lipped wind;
God, they piped, is lilting in our arches,
  For He loveth leafen kind.

Ferns I heard, unfolding from their slumber,
  Say confiding to the reed:
God well knoweth us, Who loves to number
  Us and all our fairy seed.

Voices hummed as of a multitude
  Crowding from their lowly sod;
'Twas the stricken daisies where I stood,
  Crying to the daisies' God.[2]

¶ I read the other day of some travellers who were going through Asia, and who came to a very dismal valley; it was filled with the bones of men and animals that had been killed on the heights, and been carried down by the torrents. It was a dreary and desolate place, and they said, "We will call this 'The Valley of Dry Bones.'" But the next morning, when they got to the top, they saw a rare butterfly, a most beautiful thing, fluttering in the pleasant sunshine. One of them caught it, and

[1] T. de Witt Talmage. [2] Shane Leslie.

they were all filled with admiration and wonder at the beauty of its wings, and they said, "We will not call this valley 'The Valley of Dry Bones'; we will call it 'The Butterfly Pass.'"[1]

IV.

Remember the Purpose of God.

1. These chapters of Deuteronomy purport to be a kind of valedictory or compendious summing up by Moses of the salient points of Hebrew history since the days of the Exodus. They had been casting about in the frightful desert of Sin, a tract lying south of Palestine, into which desolate region they entered after leaving the Red Sea. Their apparently aimless wanderings had consumed forty years, and towards the close of that period, and as his own end drew nigh, Moses is reported to have delivered this farewell discourse. He reminds his people of the battles they had fought with the Canaanitish tribes, the difficulties that blocked their advance, and the discouragements that appalled them. He also states the conditions upon which their future prosperity and permanence depend, that they must remember Mount Horeb and the Decalogue; and he intimates the reason why, instead of marching directly up out of Egypt into the promised possession, they had been led by such a toilsome, circuitous route. It was not because they could not have reached their inheritance by a shorter cut; indeed, ninety days at the utmost would have sufficed to bring them, bag and baggage, man and beast, into the land of milk and honey. But, says their great leader, remember that it has required forty years to accomplish this march, and this in order to put you under conditions that should test the qualities of your disposition, and to ascertain whether or not you were made of stern stuff and were fit for your new responsibilities.

Such, then, appears to be the theory of Moses concerning the Hebrew Exodus; it was virtually an examination into character, an investigation into the national propensities and tastes. The Divine idea was not to carry them all safe to Canaan, and land them punctually, according to a pre-arranged schedule, but rather, by a winnowing process, to discover who were fit to

[1] J. M. Gibbon.

arrive, and who among them would make the best material for the new political structure. Hence they traversed the wilderness of Paran, marching and countermarching, hithering and thithering, now camping, now all afoot again, for forty tedious years, when a fraction of the period would have set a term to their pilgrimage, if done in a concerted, rapid manner, and if the question had been simply a geographical one. But, as a matter of fact, it was a moral question, and this made a vast difference.

¶ The grand feature of the Old Testament is that it recognizes the moral idea in the government of the race. An Egyptian historian, a Greek historian, or a Roman historian simply gives a number of pictures, pictures of kings, camps, marches, cities, battles won and lost; and when he has done that, he comes to the end of his knowledge and his task. It is the great merit of the Hebrew law-givers and prophets that they go behind the pictures, and seize the fact that the world is ruled to a distinct end, and that end moral and righteous.

2. All great thinkers feel that at the back of this visible sphere there is a Divine Architect building with a plan, a Divine Artist who is working out a distinct plan and idea, a Divine Dramatist who fits the various parts into a perfect drama. It is impossible to look at this planet with its orderliness, its harmony, its evolution, without believing in a Divine and Supreme Ruler. It would be difficult to believe anything else, and it is not difficult to believe in the government of God, if we look into the history of the human race. It would be as difficult to resist the conception of government in respect of the human race as it is to resist the conception of government in regard to the material Universe.

¶ It is not difficult to believe in the Divine government when you look at the career of extraordinary men. When you look at Cyrus or Cæsar, when you think of Paul or Luther, it is very easy to believe in the supernaturalism that shapes the ends of these magnificent and influential lives. If you will only take a wide theatre, if you will only regard the evolution of a race, you can scarcely escape from the conception of an overshadowing supernaturalism, of a sovereign and a shaping Head. I will tell you where the difficulty begins. The difficulty begins the very moment that you begin to think of that supernatural order taking care of ordinary people like us and the trivial interests

that we represent. A man is not a sceptic looking at the starry firmament—not when he takes cognizance of the planet, not when he regards the sweep and evolution of the race—the scepticism comes in when a man begins to think of that magnificent order embracing him, shaping his lot, and commanding his trifling interests.[1]

¶ Astrologers and physicists, who, shut out from the knowledge of God, ascribe changes and events to the stars and to nature, resemble an ant that, seeing a pen making marks upon paper, should be overjoyed and cry out, "I have found out the secret of the effect. It is the pen that causes the marks." A second ant, looking on with attention, sees that the pen does not move of itself, but rather by the will of the hand, and says to the first ant, "You were mistaken, you did not perceive the real nature of the thing; you thought the marks and movements were caused by the pen. It is not so; the whole influence proceeds from the fingers, and the pen is subject to the fingers." This ant resembles the astrologer, who ascribes effects to the constellations. He does not know that he also is mistaken, that the stars and the constellations are subject to the angels, and that the angels can do nothing without the command of God.[2]

3. What was the purpose of the leading of the Israelites? It was humiliation and probation—"to humble thee and to prove thee."

(1) Humility is a great Christian virtue, and the humbling discipline to which men and women are subjected under God is a Christian commonplace. And just because it is a commonplace of our spiritual furniture we think so lightly of it. People talk about the rarity of Christian charity, but Christian humility is much more rare, and if there is one thing that men and women want to-day it is a little humbling. We are all so proud of ourselves, we are all so sure that if we were left to ourselves we could do things so well. God teaches us with absolute certainty that we cannot stand alone.

¶ There has been a discussion going on of late whether all talk in the Bible about sin is not a mistake, whether our ordinary, respectable congregations ought to be spoken to at all about sin, whether the language of humiliation, which is so often used in Christian services, is not misused. All this is wonderfully characteristic of to-day. People are all so sure of everything; this life has become so safe, so pleasant, so easy, that any notion

[1] W. L. Watkinson. [2] Al Ghazzali.

of humiliation or any note of weakness strikes them as being altogether foreign—a thing that need not be entertained.[1]

Hear me, O God!
A broken heart
Is my best part:
Use still Thy rod,
That I may prove
Therein Thy love.

If Thou hadst not
Been stern to me,
But left me free,
I had forgot
Myself and Thee.

For sin's so sweet,
As minds ill bent
Rarely repent,
Until they meet
Their punishment.[2]

(2) "To prove thee." God's guidance is a guidance for discipline; it means testing. The whole history of the Hebrew people was a testing process, to see whether they would be fit for their great work in the history of the world; and the whole of God's dealing with us is a testing, to make us fit for the particular work that He has for us to do.

¶ The Bible and Christianity represent the earth as a theatre erected by the Supreme Wisdom to be the scene of an experiment —not a mechanical or chemical experiment, but, far more serious, a moral one. This is the Christian theory of the earth and man, not stated in terms of matter and force, but in terms of mind and morality. So that while gold, iron, brass are hidden in the interior of the earth, and while forests of timber grow out of it, while seas tumble and flash on its surface, and harvests return year after year to feed man's hunger, and he may build up his lofty civilisation out of the raw materials furnished in nature, clothing himself in furs and fine linen, hewing his dwelling-place out of porphyry and granite, baking clay for brick, and feeding upon the finest wheat, nevertheless, it was not the primary design to create and upholster a planet that should simply satisfy the animal appetite, and where man could browse and fatten

[1] W. B. Selbie. [2] Ben Jonson.

and frisk like a calf. The true conception of the earth is as a place where each element, each fact, is a symbol of something occult and supernatural. Consequently it is not so important that men should hunt for gold as that they should know what use to make of it when found. It is not so important that they should build arks and leviathans fit to ride stormy seas as it is that the nations be drawn together and the federation of the world be hastened. It is not so important that they should grind glasses and set and sight telescopes, resolve nebulæ, weigh planets, and predict eclipses, as it is that behind the stars and the firmaments they should detect mind, intelligence, and will. Without this moral intention the universe becomes a great grist-mill, and man a blind horse on an endless plank. The earth's flora and fauna, its marbles and metals, its sunrises and sunsets, all that it contains and carries—all is part of a curriculum provided for the instruction and elevation of man. The whole experiment of this revolving earth is in order to the fashioning of human faculties and that man should be led up to the top of his possibilities. If we leave out this consideration, it will be hard to account for the present constitution of things; the earth will deteriorate into a larder, a ranch for cattle, instead of being a solemn scene where man, made in the image of God, is getting stature, and wisdom and expansion, and making increase in the higher elements of personality.[1]

4. This proving is to know what was in their hearts, whether they would keep His commandments or not. And it is a truth of great moment that God is conducting men and women through this earthly scene in order to show what is in their hearts. And, if so, one can imagine what thrilling tragedies, broad farces, amazing spectacles are enacted on these boards of time. We pass across the platform, each playing his little part, each pushed by his strongest impulse, each illustrating his leading trait, each acting out his deepest, most real self and showing forth what is in his heart.

¶ God leads men as He led those forlorn, overspent, wandering Jews, through drought and heat, through alarms and ambuscades, to see if they are strong enough to assault and carry some battlemented Jericho and to eat the purple clusters of Eshcol. It is a solemn truth, indeed, that your life is the solution of a problem—a public exhibition of your personal character and moral temper. Are you a sensualist? Well, then, you will have

[1] J. Sparhawk Jones.

abundant opportunity to show what is in your heart—eating and drinking your way through the world, and living by the force of the natural appetites. Are you addicted to greed and money-getting? This is only pouring the cedar-oil of immortality around perishable commodities and showing what is in your heart. Are you devoured by love of self-display, with a wolf's hunger for admiration, applause, popularity? This is little better than the strutting of a lordly peacock in gay plumage, self-centred and self-seeking. Everywhere, at every turn, in the shop, in the office, in the drawing-room, on the street, we are showing what is in our heart—our ideals, aims, by what arguments and motives we are actuated. Study it carefully, and this is really a prolific principle, and one of wide applicability, that underlay the Exodus. For it comes to this, that, however we may designate our callings and occupations in life, there is a deep below, and in the Divine idea of them they are, essentially, the ways and means by which we are discovered to ourselves and displayed to others.[1]

¶ When Joseph overheard his brothers saying, "We are verily guilty," he did not at once reveal himself to them and offer them forgiveness. Some readers blame him on this account. A foreign writer says, "He is hard-hearted enough systematically and in cold blood to punish them for the suffering they inflicted on him" and "to put them to the torture," when he should have instantly fallen upon their necks and kissed them. If Joseph had been a weaker man he would have done as is here suggested. If his amiability had been untempered by principle, he would have done it. But Joseph's conscience was as sound as his heart was tender. He had serious work to do before he indulged in emotion. He avoided the sentiment which blurs the distinctions between good and evil. Forgiveness was not his only duty to his brothers. He had to test the reality of their repentance, to drive the arrow of conviction deeper into their hearts, keeping his own lips sealed till the right moment came for divulging to them his secret. He could endure the pain of seeing them suffer, in the hope that suffering would bring them to a better mind. Providence was making him their judge, as nature had made him their brother, and he loved them with that exacting love which has often been an erring brother's salvation. He would rejoice to have them reconciled to himself, but still more to see them reconciled to God. Love does not always caress and soothe and say kind things. Sometimes it scourges. Its mingled goodness and severity are the reflection of the perfect love of God, who

[1] J. Sparhawk Jones.

leads His children along rough ways to repentance that He may at last have the joy of giving them the kiss of forgiveness.[1]

5. God finds out what is in men's hearts, whether they will keep His commandments or not. The history of the past, the discipline of the past, the way by which God has led us, all come to this—to the discovery whether we are willing to keep God's commandments or not. We do not need to confine ourselves to these words, these commands, these ordinances which we have in this Book. That was merely a temporary and evanescent way of expressing God's will for His people. We, in our time, have to read into all these commandments all we know of God and His requirements and His leading. It may not be very much; with some of us it is not very much. We can at least be firm, faithful and fervent in our lives; can believe it is better to be pure than impure, to be truthful than false, to be honest than dishonest; and if we have nothing more to say about God than to make Him a kind of moral rule, that will carry us a long way. We can at least realize that these things which we ought to be and do represent to us the command of God, and we can live for these things rather than for ourselves; we can keep these commandments rather than our own; we can let God be our law rather than be a law unto ourselves.

> And O, my heart, my heart,
> Be careful to go strewing in and out
> Thy way with good deeds, lest it come about
> That when thou shalt depart,
> No low lamenting tongue be found to say,
> The world is poorer since thou went'st away.[2]

V.

The Uses of Remembering.

1. To remember the way that God has led us is to feel *Gratitude.* The Israelites were, for the most part, ungrateful. They were always forgetting that God was taking care of them. They did so in the wilderness and out of it; it was their constant fault all through their national history. It was the great complaint of the prophets, speaking as God's interpreters, that the people

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, pt. ii. 120. [2] Alice Cary.

did not consider. If they had only considered who their Rock was, and who their Strength was, they would have been grateful; but they forgot. Do not let us forget. Let us remember all things in order that we may be duly thankful. Gratitude is not only a duty, it is a delight. It is most pleasing and comforting to the heart to be grateful to Him who has enabled such great things to be done. Our blessings come from Him, and if we think of Him even when we eat a crust, that crust will be all the sweeter to us in that remembrance, because it will be seasoned with thankfulness.

¶ It seems hard to tell quivering lips to be thankful, and to bid a man be grateful though his eyes fill with tears as he looks back on the past. But yet it is true that it is good for us to be drawn, or to be driven, to Him; it is good for us to have to tread even a lonely path if it makes us lean more on the arm of our Beloved. It is good for us to have places made empty if, as in the year when Israel's King died, we shall thereby have our eyes purged to behold the Lord sitting on the Royal Seat.

> Take it on trust a little while
> Thou soon shalt read the mystery right,
> In the full sunshine of His smile.

And for the present let us try to remember that He dwelleth in the darkness as in the light, and that we are to be thankful for the things that help us to be near Him, and not only for the things that make us outwardly glad.[1]

> I bring my hymn of thankfulness
> To Thee, dear Lord, to-day;
> Though not for joys Thy name I bless,
> And not for gifts I pray.
> The griefs that know not man's redress
> Before Thy feet I lay.[2]

2. Remembrance strengthens *Faith*. For what is remembrance but the appeal to experience? And the appeal to experience is one of the most practical appeals which carry conviction even to minds which do not care to investigate the grounds of their validity. When the Pharisees said to the blind man whom Jesus had cured, "Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner," his answer was, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I

[1] A. Maclaren. [2] Rose Terry Cooke.

know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." That was his experience; and then, showing how his experience had strengthened his faith, he added, "Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes."

3. Our remembrance of the leading of God will give us *Courage* to go on. It was said that the presence of Napoleon Bonaparte on the field of battle was equal to the arrival of 40,000 soldiers to his side because it gave his troops new courage. They felt that, their great commander being with them, and his eye being upon them, they could do anything. But what are the Napoleon Bonapartes of the world compared with the Most High? When we think that God is with us, that the mighty God is our Leader, our Champion, our Deliverer, then surely that must give us courage. No man can think of God being on his side and tremble.

4. Remember, and let the memory lead to *Contrition.* Perhaps some man or woman holds the memory of some great lapse from goodness; some young man who for the first time has been tempted to sensuous sin; some man who may have been led into slippery places in regard to business integrity. Perhaps some one would give a good deal if he or she could forget a certain moment of the past months which makes their cheeks hot yet whilst they think of it. To such comes this word: Remember. Go into the presence of the black thing, and get the consciousness of it driven into your heart; for such remembrance is the first step to deliverance from the load, and to your passing, emancipated from the bitterness, into the future that lies before you.

5. And, then, remembrance of God will induce *Consecration.* What is consecration? It is giving ourselves into God's hands. It is recognizing Christ as our Master, God as our Leader, and giving our life for His life, our love for His love.

¶ How many moments stand out distinct before you as moments of high communion with God? How many times can you remember of devout consecration to Him? How many, when —as visitors to the Riviera reckon the number of days in the season in which, far across the water, they have seen Corsica— you can remember this year to have beheld. faint and far away,

"the mountains that are round about" the "Jerusalem that is above"? How many moments do you remember of consecration and service, of devotion to your God and your fellows?[1]

I am but clay in Thy hands, but Thou art the all-loving Artist.
Passive I lie in Thy sight, yet in my selfhood I strive
So to embody the life and the love Thou ever impartest,
That in my sphere of the finite I may be truly alive.

Knowing Thou needest this form, as I Thy divine inspiration,
Knowing Thou shapest the clay with a vision and purpose divine,
So would I answer each touch of Thy hand in its loving creation,
That in my conscious life Thy power and beauty may shine.

Reflecting the noble intent Thou hast in forming Thy creatures;
Waking from sense into life of the soul, and the image of Thee;
Working with Thee in Thy work to model humanity's features
Into the likeness of God, myself from myself I would free.

One with all human existence, no one above or below me;
Lit by Thy wisdom and love, as roses are steeped in the morn;
Growing from clay to a statue, from statue to flesh, till Thou know me
Wrought into manhood celestial, and in Thine image re-born.

So in Thy love will I trust, bringing me sooner or later
Past the dark screen that divides these shows of the finite from Thee.
Thine, Thine only, this warm dear life, O loving Creator!
Thine the invisible future, born of the present, must be.[2]

[1] A. Maclaren. [2] C. P. Cranch.

THE GOOD WILL OF A LIFETIME.

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The Good Will of a Lifetime.

The good will of him that dwelt in the bush.—Deut. xxxiii. 16.

1. Moses had been young and now was old. The words of the text are taken from his benediction, which he pronounced upon the children of Israel as he stood with them on the borders of the promised land. There is something very touching in the reminiscence. The long journey through the desert is over. He has done God's work nobly and successfully. Well may he be proud of this people that he has led up to the threshold of their inheritance. But now his mind is running backward. This crowning of his mission with clear success reminds him of the time when his mission started out in mystery and weakness. He sees again a bush which he once saw by a wayside. He is a young man again, a shepherd keeping his father-in-law's flock on the back side of the desert, by Mount Horeb. He sees once more the bush on fire. He draws near again with unshod feet, and once more in his aged ears he hears the voice out of the bush commissioning him for the great work of his life. With that impulse which we all have felt, that brings up at the close of any work the freshened memory of its beginning, this old man sees the burning bush again as he saw it years before, only with deeper understanding of its meaning, and a completer sense of the love of God which it involved. He looks into the past, and all the mercy that had come in between—all the miraculous food, and the wonderful victories, and the parted waters, and the constant guidance, he sees now, were all certainly involved in that first summons of God which he had once obeyed so blindly; and when he wants to give his people the benediction that represents to him the most complete and comprehensive love, it is touching to hear the old man go back and invoke "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush."

2. There seems a peculiar appropriateness in this reference being put into the mouth of the ancient Lawgiver, for to him even Sinai, with all its glories, cannot have been so impressive and so formative of his character as was the vision granted to him when solitary in the wilderness. It is to be noticed that the characteristic by which God is designated here never occurs except in this one place. It is intended to intensify the conception of greatness, and preciousness, and all-sufficiency of that "good will." If it is that "of him that dwelt in the bush," it is sure to be all that a man can need. The words occur in the blessing pronounced on "Joseph"—that is, the two tribes which represented Joseph—in which all the greatest material gifts that could be desired by a pastoral people are first called down upon them, and then the ground of all these is laid in "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush." "The blessing—let it come on the head of Joseph."

3. Do not let us forget the place which the text holds in this blessing on the head of Joseph. It is preceded by an invoking of "the precious things of heaven" and "the precious fruits brought forth by the sun" . . . "the chief things of the ancient mountains," and "the precious things of the lasting hills," and "the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof." They are all heaped together in one great mass for the beloved Joseph. And then, like the golden spire that tops some of those campaniles in Italian cities, and completes their beauty, above them all there is set, as the shining apex of all, "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush." That is more precious than all other precious things; it is set last because it is to be sought first; set last as in the building of some great structure the top stone is put last of all; set last because it gathers all others into itself, secures that all others shall be ours in the measure in which we need them, and arms us against all possibilities of evil. So the blessing of blessings is the "good will of him that dwelt in the bush."

4. It is the retrospect of a lifetime. Like another psalmist, Moses says, "Surely goodness and mercy *have* followed me all the days of my life." And now at the end of it he blesses Joseph with the blessing of God's good-will—the good-will he found at

the beginning of his public life, the good-will that followed him throughout it, the good-will that was still with him at the end.

I. Good-will at the Beginning.
II. Good-will all the Way.
III. Good-will at the End.

I.

Good-will at the Beginning.

1. "The good will of him that dwelt in the bush." In these words the old man Moses goes back across the long years of his wilderness life, back across Elim and Marah, back across Massah and Meribah, back to that lonely bush in Horeb and the God who once met him there. That God has never left him. That fire has never gone out in his life. In pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, it has gone with him all the way, and now, standing at the end of all, he feels there is no blessing he can wish any man better than this: "May that God be his. May he too be blessed with the good will of him that dwelt in that burning bush."

2. "Good-will"—the word, perhaps, might bear a little stronger rendering. "Good-will" is somewhat tepid. A man may have a good enough will, and yet no very strong emotion of favour or delight, and may do nothing to carry his good-will into action. But the word that is employed here, and is a common enough one in Scripture, always carries with it a certain intensity and warmth of feeling. It is more than "good-will"; it is more than "favour"; perhaps "delight" would be nearer the meaning. It implies, too, not only the inward seutiment of complacency, but also the active purpose of action in conformity with it, on God's part. Now it needs few words to show that these two things, which are inseparable, do make the blessing of blessings for every one of us—the delight, the complacency, of God in us, and the active purpose of good in God for us. These are the things that will make a man happy wherever he is.

¶ "Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield." Thy crystal battlement is round a man, keeping far away from him all manner of real evil, and

filling his quiet heart, as he stands erect behind the rampart, with the sense of absolute security. That is one of the blessings that God's favour or good-will will secure for us. Again, we read: "By thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong." He who knows himself to be the object of the Divine delight, and who by faith knows himself to be the object of the Divine activity in protection, stands firm, and his purposes will be carried through, because they will be purposes in accordance with the Divine mind, and nothing has power to shake him. So he who grasps the hand of God can say, not because of his grasp, but because of the Hand that he holds, The Lord "is at my right hand; I shall not be greatly moved." "By thy favour thou hast made our mountain to stand strong." And again, in another analogous but yet diversified representation, we read: "In thy name shall they rejoice all the day," "and in thy favour shall our horn be exalted." That is the emblem, not only of victory, but of joyful confidence; and so he who knows himself to have God for his friend and his helper can go through the world keeping a sunny face, whatever the clouds may be, erect and secure, light of heart and buoyant, holding up his chin above the stormiest waters, and breasting all difficulties and dangers with a confidence far away from presumption, because it is the consequence of the realization of God's presence. So the good-will of God is the chiefest good.[1]

3. A great writer has said that the last act of a man's life is the test of it. "Show me thy fruits," says Browning—

> Show me thy fruits, this latest act of thine;
> For in the last is summed the first and all.

And no doubt there is truth in the words. The last intelligent act in a man's life is in a sense the summing up of it, the flower and the fruit of the whole; for then we see coming to their full fruition the forces that have often been unseen till then. Nevertheless, if the last act is the *fruit* of a man's life, the first is the *root* of it. When once I have seen God face to face in some great elemental experience, when once my life has burned with the fire of His presence—then I have something that will never leave me, something that will go with me all the wilderness way; and when I stand at the end of it I shall be ready like Moses to speak of "the good will of him" that met me long ago, and made my life burn with the fire of His presence.

[1] A. Maclaren.

(1) First look at the value of such a vision as an influence on a man's *character*. What is the glory of character? Is it not strength? A character may have any virtues you like, but if it lacks strength, it stands condemned. It may be brilliant, sacrificing, and that is its crown. But if it lacks strength, what is the use of it all? Who is the man to whom you look for help in the hour of a country's need? Is it the great orator, the brilliant speaker, the Aaron? No, it is the Moses-like man, the "iron-pillar," the man who knows his mind and can stick to it amidst opposition, obloquy, and contempt. And, on the other hand, who is the woman to whom you look for true companionship and guidance in the long battle of life? Is it the merely brilliant woman, the gifted talker, the drawing-room ornament? No; it is the woman of fidelity, the woman who can be true and loving when all others go against you. And what is the secret of truth? Truth is just the other side of courage. As Walter Smith says—

It needeth courage to be true.

Courage, strength—the rock-like foundations of life; these are the first things. You can build on them afterwards anything you like. Without these the superstructure falls to ruin. The glory, then, of character is its strength, but strength comes only from a great experience; and in the highest sense it comes only from the vision of God.

¶ We can understand why Moses should have desired that his people might be blessed by God with "the precious things of heaven," with "the dew and the deep that coucheth beneath," with "the precious fruits brought forth by the sun" and "the precious things put forth by the moon." But why should he ask for them such a blessing as this?—the good-will that God manifested when He dwelt in the unquenchable fire. Was not that aspect of Israel's God an aspect of deepest terror? Did it not reveal Him in those attributes which do *not* suggest good-will? Nay, my brother, it is not so. It is not only in the calm that the good-will of thy God appears, it is not only in nature's smile that the blessing of thy Father is seen. The heart of thy Father beats for thee beneath every cloud as well as in every sunbeam; the blessing of thy Father is in thy night as well as in thy day. To thee, as to every man, He comes betimes in a chariot of fire; with thee, as with every man, He dwells betimes in the burning bush of a wilderness; but the fire chariot is *His* chariot, the burning

bush is *His* dwelling-place. The fire of thy God is love; its burning is the burning of love. The pains of thy life are not accidents; they are gifts from thy Father's hand. The fire of the burning bush is meant to set fire to thy heart. It is designed to kindle thee into a glow of enthusiasm, to warm thee with the love of humanity. How *canst* thou be warmed with the love of humanity if thou hast not in thee that fellowship of the Cross which unites soul to soul? The fire that comes to thee from the bush is that which consumes the barrier between thy heart and the heart of thy brother.[1]

Across the lone floor of the rayless night
One came to a door that was barred on light,
A glimmer a-gleam through beckoning chink,
As with lamp's still beam, as with taper's blink,
And sore she sued their shrine to win,
From mirk and moan of the wild shut in,
And fled the fear its menace bore
With shrouding of shadow evermore.

So out of the dark, as it breathed its dread,
Shrill crying, she knocked with a hope ill-sped,
For grim and stark that portal wide
At her hand's touch mocked, and her prayer denied.
Then sick at heart, that found not grace,
She turned her again the night to face,
As terror turns on swift-foot foes—
And lo! the clear east all climbing rose.[2]

(2) Next see the influence which the vision of God leaves on a man's *life-work*. It produces continuance, perseverance, tenacity. If the glory of a man's character is its strength, the glory of his work is its perseverance. You can see that even in common life. Two young men come into the city—one a lad of brilliant parts, but without tenacity; the other a dull, plodding, persevering fellow. What do you find after ten years? Almost always this, that it is the plodding man who wins the race over the man of erratic gifts. And if that be true of common life, how much more of the Christian race! The Christian race is not a hundred yards' affair. It is a Marathon race, and they alone can win it who run with patience, with endurance, the course that is set before them.

[1] G. Matheson. [2] Jane Barlow.

One step more, and the race is ended;
  One word more, and the lesson's done;
One toil more, and a long rest follows
  At set of sun.

Who would fail, for one step withholden?
  Who would fail, for one word unsaid?
Who would fail, for a pause too early?
  Sound sleep the dead.

One step more, and the goal receives us;
  One word more, and life's task is done;
One toil more, and the Cross is carried
  And sets the sun.[1]

¶ I sometimes think the silences of Scripture more impressive than its speech. There is no record of it here, but I picture Moses going out of a morning to the tent door, after rising from his bed on the desert floor, and contemplating the desert with its sand and stones, with its red hills, and relentless sun, and murmuring people. It was for this he left the pleasant land of Midian. It was for this he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Forty years in the wilderness, and at the end the promised land fading away like a mirage in the desert. What kept him up? It was the memory of that "burning bush." Yes, whenever his spirit grew faint and weary, he went back in memory to that wondrous day. Once again he saw the unconsuming fire. Once again he heard the voice of God quivering through the silence of that lonely desert, and in a moment the feeble knees were strong again, and with a new courage he grasped his shepherd's staff, and went forth to meet the inevitable tasks and trials of the day.[2]

¶ John Paton of the New Hebrides tells us that one of his most vital memories was the day he left home for Glasgow, where he was to start life in earnest. In these days the journey had to be made on foot, and his father accompanied him for the first few miles of the way. At length came the parting. His father tried to frame the words of a suitable farewell, but emotion choked his utterance, and he could say little more than "Goodbye, John; God bless you!" "And I, too," says Paton, "I could say little more. I wrung his hand and hurried on." After he had gone on a little, however, curiosity and love made him turn round to get a last glimpse of his beloved father. He was still standing, "with head uncovered," where he had left him. He

[1] Christina G. Rossetti. [2] W. M. Mackay.

was praying, and Paton says, "I knew he was praying for me." "That sight," he adds, "never left me." In times of temptation, in hours of trial, in the city, in the foreign field, where he often stood face to face with death, that picture, silhouetted in the golden frame of memory, was to him a constant inspiration and a defence. This is "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush" —that it never leaves a man who has truly known it, but returns like a bright visitant in every time of need with reinforcement of faith and courage.

II.

Good-will all the Way.

The God of the Bush had been with Moses all his life. Let us consider, first, who was the God of the Bush, and, next, what His presence through life does for a man.

i. The God of the Bush.

1. He was *the Eternal God.*—When Moses, shrinking from the magnitude of the task laid upon him, wished to know what he should say if the people to whom he went should ask, Who sent you? what is his name? this answer was given him: "I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." I AM—it is the expression of independent self-existence — appropriate to none but Deity, whose consciousness is an eternal present. The thought is overwhelming; yet, overwhelming as it is, it is also steadying and comforting in its influence, and it is appropriate that in that psalm which is called the Psalm of Moses, it is said, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art—God."

¶ The fire that did not burn out is the emblem of the Divine nature which does not tend to death because it lives, nor to exhaustion because it energizes, nor to emptiness because it bestows, but after all times is the same; lives by its own energy and is independent. "I am that I have become"—that is what men have to say. "I am that I once was not, and again once shall not be" is what men have to say. "I am that I am" is God's name. And this eternal, ever-living, self-sufficing, absolute, independent, unwearied, inexhaustible God is the God whose

favour is as inexhaustible as Himself, and eternal as His own being. "Therefore the children of men" shall "put their trust under the shadow of thy wings," and if they have "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush," they will be able to say, "Because thou livest we shall live also."

2. He was *the Covenant God.*—He said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." In His reasoning with the Sadducees of His day, the Saviour drew from these words an argument for the resurrection of the body; for as God is the God not of the dead, but of the living, it must follow that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still in existence when God so described Himself, and as such would yet have their humanity perfected and glorified. The Sadducees grounded their objection to the resurrection of the body on their rejection of the immortality of the soul, and the Lord answers in this way the underlying heresy of His antagonists, leaving it to His own resurrection to prove the falsity of that which they had built thereon.

3. He was *the Delivering God.*—He said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians." Pharaoh had long oppressed them, making their lives bitter with hard bondage, and there seemed to be no Divine protest against his procedure. It looked almost as if God had forgotten the Hebrews, and for generations they were cruelly maltreated. But He was not unmindful of them, and in the fulness of time He sent Moses to be their emancipator.

4. He was *the Long-suffering God.*—How tenderly He treated Moses on that occasion! From the extreme of rashness the son of Amram had recoiled to that of timidity; and he who, forty years before, attempted to run without being sent, now sought to decline his commission altogether. He was profuse in excuses, such as that he was unworthy of the honour which was offered him; that he was unable to answer the Israelites if they should ask him, "Who sent you?" that, even if he went, the people would not believe him; and that he was not eloquent, but slow of speech and of a slow tongue. These were the pretexts which he put

forward in order, if possible, to evade the duty that was laid upon him, but out of them all God nourished him into such strength that he went at length, and became the leader of the Exodus.

5. He was *the God of Promise.*—When Moses said, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" the voice out of the bush answered, "Certainly I will be with thee." So, after Jesus had said to His followers, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"; and when, perhaps, He saw on their countenances an expression of consternation at the magnitude of the charge which He had given them, He added, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"—a large promise which only Deity would dare to make, and which, in its likeness to the words addressed to Moses—"Certainly I will be with thee"—indicates that it came from the same Divine source.

Not with unjoyful care
Nor with unpraiseful prayer
  We live below;
Assailed by pain and sin,
We yet are born to win
The holy heaven wherein
  No evils grow.

God of the peaceful height,
Thy word of promise bright
  Spans the rough sea;
A rainbow fair to view,
As broad as bright of hue,
And all souls may come through
  Travelling to Thee.[1]

ii. What the Good-will of God does for us.

Religion delights both in reminiscence and in anticipation. Being full of the sense of God, it finds a unity in life which no atheistic thought can discover. The identity of God's eternal being stretches under, and gives consistence to, our fragmentary lives. God's eternity makes our time coherent. And so it was

[1] Thomas Toke Lynch.

God in the bush that made it still visible to Moses across the eventful interval. He saw that bush when all the other bushes of Egypt had faded out of sight, because that bush was on fire with God.

And as Christianity is the most vivid of all religions, with its personally manifested God, there is a more perfect unity in a Christian life than in any other. It keeps all its parts, and from its consummations looks back with gratitude and love to its beginnings. The crown that it casts before the throne at last is the same that it felt trembling on its brow in the first ecstatic sense of Christ's forgiveness, and that has been steadily glowing into greater clearness as perfecting love has more and more completely cast out fear. The feet that go up to God into the mountain, at the end, are the same that first put off their shoes beside the burning bush. This is why the Christian, more than other men, not merely dares, but loves, to look back and remember.

Let us think, then, of the young Christian and the old Christian—the same man in his first apprehension, and in his ripened knowledge, of Christ. What is the difference between the two? What is the growth which brings one into the other? Everybody claims that the Christian experience ripens and deepens. What is there riper and deeper in the full existence that there was not in the incipient life?

1. As every Christian becomes more and more a Christian, there must be a larger and larger absorption of truth or doctrine into life. We hear all around us nowadays a great impatience with the prominence of dogma—that is, of truth abstractly and definitely stated—in Christianity. And most of those who are thus impatient really mean well. They feel that Christianity, being a thing of personal salvation, ought to show itself in characters and lives. There they are right. But to decry dogma in the interest of character is like despising food as if it interfered with health. Food is not health. The human body is built just so as to turn food into health and strength. And truth is not holiness. The human soul is made to turn, by the subtle chemistry of its digestive experience, truth into goodness. And this is just what the Christian, as he goes on, finds himself

doing under God's grace. Before the young Christian lie the doctrines of his faith—God's being, God's care, Christ's incarnation, Christ's atonement, immortality. What has the old Christian, with his long experience, done with them? He holds them no longer crudely, as things to be believed merely. He has taken them home into his nature. He has transmuted them into forms of life. God's being appears now filling his life with reverence. God's care clothes every act and thought of his with gratitude. Christ's incarnation is the inspiration of his new, dear love of all humanity. The atonement is the power of his all-pervading and deep-rooted faith. And immortality! He no longer regards as a doctrine that which has become a great constant flood of life, ever resting over and illuminating the far-off hill-tops—now grown so near, so real—of the eternal life. The young dogmatist boasts of his dogmas. The old saint lives his life. Both are natural in their places and times, as are the unripe and the ripened fruit.

Her prayer-book had repose,
  One word her heart sufficed,
Scent of a hidden rose:
    "Christ!"

To creeds her soul was shut,
  For her confession of
The Christian faith was but
    Love.

2. In the second place, as a consequence of this feature of growth, there will come a growing variety in Christian character as Christians grow older. We should expect a uniformity and resemblance in younger Christians, and a diversity in older ones, because life is more various than doctrine. Each young Christian has his doctrine, crude and dogmatic still. The maturer Christians have not merely worked those doctrines into life, but each has worked them into his own sort of life. The truth is the same for all; the life it makes is infinite. The more deeply it has been digested, the more strongly the individuality comes out.

¶ The truth that God gives us is like the wheat that a bounteous country sends into the city. It is all the same wheat; but men go and buy it and eat it, and this same identical wheat

is turned into different sorts of force in different men. It is turned into bartering force in one, and thinking force in another, and singing force in another, and governing force in another. It is manifold as soon as it passes into men.

¶ Gladstone, Newman, and Rainy—perhaps the three most remarkable men of their day of those who really applied their minds to the matters of Christian faith—were all in agreement not only as to personal experience of religion, but also—if we except certain matters about the Church (and these are not in the Creed)—as to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. But the intellectual attitude of each of these minds to these doctrines was distinct. Gladstone's mind was essentially and constitutionally orthodox, and he was never critical regarding ecclesiastical dogma. Newman's was essentially and constitutionally sceptical, and the Church's authoritative system was to him less the native home of his mind than its only refuge. Rainy's mind was well content to lodge in Catholic forms of doctrine, but he neither denied the element of imperfection and difficulty in such forms nor was disturbed by it, for this only made him more deeply feel "how great a thing it is to believe in God."[1]

3. And as individuality is developed with the deepening spiritual life, so the willingness to recognize and welcome individual differences of thought and feeling and action increases too as Christians grow riper. Seeing ourselves made more ourselves as our faith grows richer, we are glad to see other men made more themselves too. This is true charity. It is your undeveloped, crude, commonplace Christian who is uncharitable. He expects other Christians to be like himself. He has never felt that Divine, deep movement of Christ in his own soul, telling him that from all eternity there has been one certain place for him to fill, one certain thing for him to be, and summoning him to come and fill his place and be himself.

¶ I can well understand that the seeds in a sower's basket might be very uncharitable to one brother-seed that had dropped out of the basket and taken root and grown to be a stalk of corn. It is too unlike them. It is too original and singular. But let them all fall together and take root, and then, with life in all of them, they will not compare their ears and tassels, each being so busy in growing to the best that its separate bit of earth can bring it to. The true Christian charity is that which life teaches.

[1] P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, i. 287.

It is the tried and cultured souls that understand each other's trials and cultures, though they may be wholly different from their own. And no sight is more beautiful than this grace growing in a body of believers.[1]

4. And here comes in another noble characteristic of the growing spiritual experience—its ever-increasing independence. This is the best personal result of charity. There is an independence that is arrogant and defiant, and there is a dependence that is weak and fawning. Both come of narrowness. Both are the signs of immature and meagre life. One man arms himself against his brethren because he holds them to be wholly wrong and himself wholly right. Another man yields to his brethren because he fears that he is wrong and they are right. Here is a man of mellow strength who, deeply conscious of the work the Lord has done in him, made sure of it by long feeling the very pressures of God's hand kneading the truth into his nature, stands by that work, will let no man cavil it away from his tenacious consciousness, is so perfectly dependent upon Christ that he can hang upon no fellow-man, respects himself by the same reverence for the individuality of the Divine life that makes him also respect his brethren.

¶ Not long ago I read this in what many hold to be our ablest and most thoughtful journal: "It is a law, which in the present condition of human nature holds good, that strength of conviction is always in the inverse ratio of the tolerant spirit." If that is so, then the present condition of human nature is certainly very much depraved. But if human nature can ever be rescued by a personal salvation, if mankind can ever become possessed by the Spirit of God, lifting the mass by filling the individuals each with his own strong manifestation of its power, then the world may still see some maturer type of Christianity, in which new ages of positive faith may still be filled with the broadest sympathy, and men may tolerate their brethren without enfeebling themselves. Such ages may God hasten.[2]

¶ Berry reached Chicago on Saturday, 20th November, and was entertained at a reception at the house of Professor W. Douglas Mackenzie. On the following day he preached in the morning in the Union Park Congregational Church, and in the evening in the Second Presbyterian Church. On the Monday morning he addressed what was nominally a gathering of the ministers of

[1] Phillips Brooks. [2] *Ibid.*

the city in the auditorium of the Y.M.C.A. The hall was crowded to excess by an influential and representative audience composed of the leaders of the churches of the city, about a thousand people being present at an early hour. A little slip which he made in the course of his speech caused much good-natured amusement, and at the same time revealed the orator's readiness of wit and presence of mind. The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes and he had gone through England together advocating this federation of which he was speaking, and that without surrendering any of their theological convictions. "In fact, we had none to surrender," said Berry grandly. The house came down in a roar of laughter that pealed out again and again. When at last it subsided Berry said quietly, "That is one of the things which, as *Punch* would say, one had rather have expressed differently. Don't misunderstand me. There are no two men in England so full of theology as Price Hughes and myself—from the sole of our feet to the crown of our heads we are brimful. What I intended to convey was that there is nothing of these theological convictions that we are called upon to surrender so as to work upon a common platform and in a common cause." [1]

5. Another sign of the growth of Christian character is to be found in what may be called the growing transfiguration of duty. To every young Christian the new service of Christ comes largely with the look of a multitude of commandments. They throng around his life, each one demanding to be obeyed. He welcomes them joyously. He takes up his tasks with glad hands still, because they are his Master's tasks. But as he grows older in grace, is there no difference? Tell me, you who have been long the servants of our dear and gracious Lord, has there come in your long Christian life no change in the whole aspect of your service? Has not your more and more intimate sympathy with Him let you in behind many and many a duty which once seemed dark and hard, and allowed you to see the light of His loving intention burning there? Have you not grown into a clearer and deeper understanding of what Jesus meant by those sweet and wonderful words, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"? In every opening Christian life there is something Mosaic, something Hebrew. The order of the

[1] J. S. Drummond, *Charles A. Berry*, 164.

Testaments is to a certain degree repeated in the experience of every believer. At last, in the fulness of time, the New Testament has perfectly come. The law is given first, and then grace and truth come by Jesus Christ. It is no sudden transformation. It cannot be, because it cannot come otherwise than by the gradual teaching of life. But when it has wholly come, then, full of the complete consciousness of Christ, duty is done not simply because Christ has commanded it and we love Him, but because Christ has filled us with Himself, transformed our standards, and recreated our affections; and we love the duty too, seeing its essential beauty as He sees it out of whose nature it proceeds.

> Duty was renamed
> Delight, and love was ready for the winds
> Of Liberty that shake the trees upon
> The uplands of God's will.[1]

6. But, after all, the profoundest and most reliable sign of the maturing spiritual life is deepening personal intimacy with Him who is the Christian's life, the Lord Jesus Christ. All comes to that at last. Christianity begins with many motives. It all fastens itself at last upon one motive, which does not exclude, but is large enough to comprehend, all that is good in all the rest. "That I may know him." Those are St. Paul's words. How constantly we come back to his large, rounded life, as the picture of what the Christian is and becomes. Set before you the young man at Damascus and the old man at Rome, and compare the two. "That I may know him." We have all seen, if it has been our privilege to watch true Christians growing old, the special and absorbing way with which the personal Christ—their knowledge of Him, and His knowledge of them—comes to be all their religion.

¶ Christ, to the Christian growing older, seems to be what the sun is to the developing day, which it lightens from the morning to the evening. When the sun is in the zenith in the broad noonday, men do their various works by his light; but they do not so often look up to him. It is the sunlight that they glory in, flooding a thousand tasks with clearness, making a million things beautiful. But as the world rolls into the evening, it is the sun

[1] Anna Bunston, *The Porch of Paradise*, 24.

itself at sunset that men gather to look at and admire and love. So to the earlier and middle stages of a Christian life, Christ is the revealer of duty and of truth; and duty and truth become clear and dear in His light. The young Christian glories in the way in which, under his Master's power, he can work for humanity, for truth, for his nation, for society, for his family. But as the Christian life ripens into evening, it is not on these things, though they are not forgotten, that the soul dwells most. It is on the Lord Himself. It is that He is the soul's, and the soul is His. It is His wondrousness, His dearness, and His truth that fill the life as it presses closer to where He stands—as the setting earth rolls on towards the sun.

Now, if the personal presence of Christ becomes clearer to us as we grow riper in the Christian life, there are certain effects which it will produce. They are the noble characteristics of the maturest Christians.

(1) It will make us *more unworldly*. To be always living with One whose kingdom is not of this world, to be constantly conversant, as we hold intercourse with Him, with the thought that there are other worlds also over which He presides, and with which we have something to do through our union with Him—how this breaks up and scatters the littleness of life, the bondage of the seen. How it lets us out, free to trace the course of every action, the career of every thought, as it seeks vast untold issues in other spheres.

(2) And, if we get this, then something else must come, namely, *more hopefulness*. St. Paul has a noble verse which says that experience worketh hope. It must, if it is full of Christ. The soul that is getting deeper and deeper into the certain knowledge of Him must be learning that it has no right to fear; that, however hopeless things look, there can be nothing but success for every good cause in the hand of Christ. It is a noble process for a man's life that gradually changes the cold dogma that "truth is strong and must prevail" into a warm, enthusiastic certainty that "my Christ must conquer." It is terrible to see a man calling himself a Christian who despairs more of the world the longer he lives in it. It shows that he is letting the world's darkness come between him and his Lord's light. It shows that he is not near enough to Christ.

(3) And with the growing hopefulness there comes *a growing*

courage. How timid we are at first. It seems as if just to get this soul of ours saved were all that we could dare to try; but as the Saviour's strength becomes more manifest to us, as we know Him more, we see that He is able to do much more than that. We begin to aspire to have a little part in the great conquest of the world in which He is engaged. And so the Soldier of the Cross at last is out in the very thick of the battle, striking at all his Master's enemies in the perfect assurance of his Master's strength.

(4) And then, as the crown of all these, there comes to the maturing Christian, out of his constant companionship with Christ, that *true and perfect poise of soul* which grows more and more beautiful as we grow tired, one after another, of the fantastic and one-sided types of character which the world admires, and which seem to us very attractive at first. Expectant without impatience; patient without stagnation; waiting, but always ready to advance; loving to advance, but always ready to wait; full of confidence, but never proud; full of certainty, but never arrogant; serene, but enthusiastic; rich as a great land is rich in the peace that comes to it from the government of a great, wise, trusty governor—this is the life whose whole power is summed up in one word—Faith. "Here is the patience and faith of the saints." This is the life to which men come who, through long years, "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."[1]

A state
Where all is loveliness, and power, and love;
Where all sublimest qualities of mind,
Not infinite, are limited alone
By the all-surrounding godhood; and where nought
But what createth glory and delight
To creature and Creator is; where all
Enjoy entire dominion o'er themselves,
Acts, feelings, thoughts, conditions, qualities,
Spirit and soul and mind.[2]

III.

Good-will at the End.

In the mouth of Moses the words, "The good will of him that dwelt in the bush" had, in this blessing of the tribe of Joseph just

[1] Phillips Brooks. [2] P. J. Bailey, *Festus.*

before he died, a far richer significance than they could have had when, after having seen the great sight and heard the great words, he turned away from the desert of Midian, and took his journey into Egypt. He went on there in faith, but now he could look back upon a rich experience. Between the bush and the plains of Moab lay forty years of the fullest realization of all that Jehovah had promised, and so he commended Joseph's children to One whom he knew to be faithful to His word. Had he not been to Egypt and brought out his people into freedom? Had he not enjoyed closest fellowship with God as a man talketh with his friend? Had he not been directed by Him in every difficulty and provided for by Him in every strait? So now he tells them that whom he had proved, they might trust. The Lord who had with him stood the strain of the Exodus, and the test of the wilderness wanderings, and was with him still, would not fail them in their time of need.

Is not this true of our Lord yet? Whom has He failed? When has He broken His word? Who dares to say that he has gone to Him and been cast out? Is it not the unvarying testimony of His people in all generations that they never found Him wanting? While there is so much that is parallel to the gospel in this conference between Jehovah and Moses at Midian, there is in one point a marked difference between the two. The Jehovah of the bush said, "Draw not nigh hither," but the Jesus of the Cross says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That is just the great distinction between the old dispensation and the new, and it was rendered necessary by the circumstances of the times. In those ancient days the world was not ready to receive the gospel invitation. There needed yet a long education before men would listen to it either with patience or appreciation, and so the truth, while preserved among them in the figurative system of Judaism, needed also to be protected from them by the restrictions which hedged that system round. These restrictions were like the horn framework of the lantern through which the light shone, no doubt, only dimly, but by which, also, it was kept from being extinguished by the rude blasts of idolatry and immorality. Now, however, they have served their purpose and are no longer needed. The veil of the temple has been rent asunder; the temple itself has

disappeared; and, instead of the "Draw not nigh," we may hear the "Come unto me"; for in Him "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."

1. The old man refers to the days of his youth. He is no longer old; he is young. With his shepherd's staff, tending his sheep below the bare mountain of Horeb, he sees what he had never seen before—a thorn-tree in flame. The old man places his one hand upon the first object of his life, and his other hand he places upon the last, and between the two his whole history is comprised—from Sinai, through Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the desert to the Jordan. It is all there. His whole life is in his grasp, and he is carrying it with him up the mountain and into eternity.

2. The beginning and the end of life are brought together. The man, one hundred and twenty years old, burdened with the weight of days, his eye bright as ever, his natural force of character but little impaired, his hair white, the sign at once of age and of a vast experience, leaning upon the staff that he carried for support, giving the words of affectionate blessing that come so well from the aged. Here he parts from those with whom he had journeyed so long. It is the last glimpse that we have of the man. Here he enters into the dark portal. That is one picture. But the other picture is that of an active, careless young man, who had broken loose from the restraint of Egyptian society, wandering about as a Bedouin Arab. How great a contrast between those two! And yet those two are the same man. What a wonderful thing is this continuance of personality.

3. Observe lastly the deep mark made on an old man by his religious experience. Moses goes back to the hour when, in the loneliness of the desert, he first realized the presence and the reality of God; when the spiritual world first became to him a real world, and with deep feeling he felt that he stood upon holy ground. In that hour he was first called by God summoning him to an earnest life. It was that meeting with God that coloured his whole history; and now when strength is failing, and death is near, he goes back to it, and he wishes for those whom he leaves that the blessing which came to him in that experience may come to them also—"The good will of him that dwelt in the bush."

¶ On what is it that our eye will rest most lovingly as it glances along the line of our closing life? It will not be on the hours of folly or sin by which our life has been stained. It will rather be on the fitful moments when those things have been real to us which to most men are unreal—when, as through an opening in a tangled forest, we have looked upwards and seen the blue sky above us, and have shaped our course by the glimpse that we have had. God was near us then. We heard His voice then; we felt His presence in our souls and we were assured of His good-will. We chose then the better part, and we trusted ourselves to Him as our Father and as our Saviour. And now, when strength is failing and the shades of eventide are falling thick and fast, and the unknown future is before us, we know that we have His good-will.[1]

Never, my heart, wilt thou grow old!
My hair is white, my blood runs cold,
And one by one my powers depart,
But youth sits smiling in my heart.

Downhill the path of age! oh, no;
Up, up with patient steps I go;
I watch the skies fast brightening there,
I breathe a sweeter, purer air.

Beside my road small tasks spring up,
Though but to hand the cooling cup,
Speak the true word of hearty cheer,
Tell the lone soul that God is near.

Beat on, my heart, and grow not old!
And when thy pulses all are told,
Let me, though working, loving still,
Kneel as I meet my Father's will.[2]

[1] J. Cameron Lees. [2] Louisa Jane Hall.

God Who is our Home.

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God Who is our Home.

The eternal God is thy dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.—Deut. xxxiii. 27.

These words, while almost the last, are also among the most memorable, in the psalm so fitly described as "the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death." They express one of the sublimest truths of faith—a truth Moses himself had realized in the court of Pharaoh, on the peak of Sinai, in the hurry of flight, and in the calm and glory of the Divine Face. He had finished his work, the law was given, the wilderness traversed, the goodly land in sight, and now he had but to be led by the hand of God to the top of Nebo, and thence into great eternity. The voice he knew and loved so well had said to him, "Get thee up into this mountain of Abarim unto Mount Nebo, and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people." That was a very sweet and soothing command to the weary soul of the old man. His had been a long day; and now, travel-sick, toil-worn, in its mellow autumn twilight, he was to set—

> As sets the morning star, which goes not down
> Behind the darkened west, nor hides obscured
> Among the tempests of the sky, but melts away
> Into the light of heaven.

But before he goes to the point of evanishment into the everlasting light, he pauses to bless the people; and as he stands on the border-land between time and eternity, feeling his soul in the hands of God, he utters this truth of highest, holiest import, "The eternal God is thy dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

The two lines of the text are not identical. The second line is not a mere repetition of the first. It is the usual manner of

Hebrew poetry to run in couplets, but the second line of the couplet usually carries the thought a stage further than the first, or gives it a closer application. The thought of the first line is that God is the dwelling-place of His people, their home—with all that the word "home" carries or can carry to our hearts and minds. Then the second line arrests a possible doubt. Is there no danger that we may slip away from the Divine shelter? We need not fear; "underneath are the everlasting arms."

I.

The Eternal God is thy Dwelling-place.

The children of Israel had need to be reminded of the eternal refuge and support when they were about to lose the presence and guidance of the man who had been their leader and companion in their toilsome and troubled march through the wilderness for forty years. Moses was leaving them, but leaving them with God. They were homeless, and their national future was uncertain and hidden; but to-morrow, as to-day, from generation to generation, they would be in the presence and care of the Eternal, in the arms of the everlasting power and peace.

i. The Eternal God.

"I feel that if I can believe in God I believe in all that I need," wrote an eminent Presbyterian divine in the record of his private reflections. To believe truly and fully in God may be all that we really need to inspire and sustain our hearts, but this most necessary thing is the most difficult thing in the world. It is the hardest and rarest attainment of life. Oh blessed soul! that has reached and realized through its own experience this ancient and sublime trust: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

¶ "The eternal God" is the God *of old*, literally *aforetime*. The word denotes what is ancient rather than what is eternal. It is often used of the Mosaic age, or other distant periods of Israel's past (Ps. xliv. 1, lxxiv. 2, 12; Isa. li. 9; Mic. vii. 20), and even of a former period of a single lifetime (Job xxix. 2). It is used also of mountains (Deut. xxxiii. 15), of the heavens (Ps. lxviii. 33). Besides the present text it is used of God in Hab. i. 12; Ps. lv. 19 (where the R.V. is "he that abideth *of old*").

1. What does a man mean when he says, "I believe in God"? "God" is a most elastic term, capable of narrowing to suit the meanest capacity, of expanding to fill the largest. It seems to have a sense intelligible to the simplest mind, while to the profoundest it becomes the symbol of thoughts too high to be spoken, too immense to be comprehended. But though it may signify very different things to different minds, what it signifies does not thereby become unreal. It stands as the symbol of the best and highest Being man can conceive, his idea of the Being rising with his thought of the good and the high.

2. The notions of the men who first called the Being they worshipped God do not bind the latest; the word may remain while its contents are transfigured, as it were changed from one degree of glory to another. But while later ages may outgrow the ideas earlier ages expressed by the term "God," they do not outgrow the idea which the term represents. The symbol widens to their thought as the firmament has widened to the telescope, telling, as it widens, secrets before undreamed of, showing such infinite reaches of space, such multitudes and varieties of star clusters, of worlds beyond worlds, as to awe the imagination in its loftiest mood.

3. When we speak of God we speak of Him as a personal Being, a free and conscious Will. If God be impersonal, He can have no heart tender with love, no will moved by swift-footed mercy, regulated by the large righteousness that loves order and deals with the individual through his relations to the whole, no gracious ends for the universe, or energies active in it that may cheer the despondent and help him in his sad struggle with ill.

¶ I have only that which the poor have equally with the rich; which the lonely have equally with the man of many friends. To me this whole strange world is homely, because in the heart of it there is a home; to me this cruel world is kindly, because higher than the heavens there is something more human than humanity. If a man must not fight for this, may he fight for anything? I would fight for my friend, but if I lost my friend I should still be there. I would fight for my country, but if I lost my country I should still exist. But if what that devil dreams were true, I

should not be—I should burst like a bubble and be gone; I could not live in that imbecile universe. Shall I not fight for my own existence?[1]

¶ What are the elements essential to a person? They are two—consciousness and will; or the knowledge by a being that he is, that he knows, that he acts and has reasons for his action; and the power of free or spontaneous, or, simply, rational choice. Where these are, there is a person; where they are not, there is only a thing. Personality is simply the power of ordered and reasonable conduct, whether it be in ruling a world or in regulating a life.[2]

¶ Personality expresses itself, not by eternal processes, but by individual words and deeds. If there be personality in God at all, it means that He who is behind me, and beneath me, and above me, who besets me everywhere, who is in all nature—the source of forces, the measure of law, the orderer of events—*can* also, *can*, as Person with person, stand face to face with me on the platform of His own world to speak and to be answered. But can He do it *worthily*? Can He do it so as to complete, without fatally perplexing, the manifestation of Himself? I point for answer to Jesus Christ.[3]

4. Let it be noted that the text expresses no transcendental or speculative doctrine of Moses, but simply a fact of his experience. The eternal God had been his refuge. He had known better than most men the extremes of wealth and poverty, power and weakness, fulness and want. He had known solitude amid the gaieties and glories of the then most splendid court on earth. He had enjoyed Divine society on the sultry and solitary slopes of Horeb. He knew the best that Pharaoh could do for him, the worst that he could do against him, and had found both to be infinitely little. He had known, in all its anxious and bitter phases, what it was to be the loved and hated, trusted and suspected, praised and blamed, leader of a mutinous and murmuring and unstable people. The realities and semblances, the dreams and the disappointments, the actualities and the illusions of life he had alike experienced; and the grand truth which had amid all given stability, strength, and comfort was, "The eternal God *my* refuge, and underneath the everlasting arms."

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross.* [2] A. M. Fairbairn.
[3] *Life of Principal Rainy*, ii. 134.

5. A great poet, whose words are equally dear to men of letters and to men of science, tells us "the eternal womanliness draws us ever on"; that is, the love, the beauty, the sweet and potent gentleness personified in ideal woman is a ceaseless inspiration to man, wakes him to admiration, wins him to love. But there is one term that embraces everlasting womanliness and infinitely more, the term Eternal Father, or in its simple and beautiful paraphrase, "God is love." When we think of the eternal God, then we think of the living Source of good, active at all moments in all lives. He is righteousness, but also love; He is truth, but grace as well. His character determines His ends, His ends justify His ways. His acts become Him, are not accommodated to our deserts, but to His own character and designs. He does not deal with us after our sins, but according to His mercies and in harmony with His own ends. No man is to God an isolated individual, but a unit within a mighty whole, loved as a person, but handled as one whose being was deemed necessary to complete the universe, and judged through the ends of Him who means the universe to be complete. And the man who believes in God, believes in One who loved him from eternity, whose love called him into being, designed and prepared a place for him in the system His wisdom ordained and His will maintains. He knows that, amid all the shadows and sorrows and shame of life, underneath him and around are the everlasting arms.

¶ The two sublimest affirmations concerning the Deity in the inspired Word are these—"God is Light," "God is Love." It is the latter of these two which, apparently, had so taken hold of the mind and the heart of Browning that he never wearies of reiterating the statement of the fact in numerous connexions and in various forms. In "Paracelsus" he declares unhesitatingly:

> God! Thou art love! I build my faith on that.

And presently, praying for one who has erred, and for himself, he says:

> Save him, dear God; it will be like Thee: bathe him
> In light and life! Thou art not made like us;
> We should be wroth in such a case; but Thou
> Forgivest—so, forgive these passionate thoughts
> Which come unsought and will not pass away!

I know Thee, who hast kept my path, and made
Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow
So that it reached me like a solemn joy;
It were too strange that I should doubt thy love.[1]

ii. A Dwelling-place.

Our need of the eternal God is but too manifest. Weak and mortal, man feels himself a most helpless being. Birth and death are stronger than he; of the one he is the product, of the other the victim. He comes out of a past eternity, in which he had no conscious being; he must go into an eternal future where he is to be—he knows not what. This little conscious present is all he has, all that sense can discover or intellect disclose. Mind can see, can feel, the lonely sadness of this little life—can look out into the infinities of space and time, realize their boundlessness and its own minute personality, till it feels like a small self-conscious star twinkling solitary in an immense expanse.

¶ In moments when the thought of these infinities, conceived only as such, has been strong in me, I have felt like one standing, and reeling while he stood, on a narrow pillar reared high in space, looking up to a starless sky, out on a boundless immensity, down into a bottomless abyss, till in the despair of utter loneliness the soul has cried, "Oh for the face of the eternal God above, and the everlasting arms below."[2]

The dearest things in this fair world must change;
  Thy senses hurry on to sure decay;
Thy strength will fail, the pain seem no more strange,
  While love more feebly cheers the misty way.
What then remains above the task of living?
  Is there no crown where that rude cross hath pressed?
Yes, God remains, His own high glory giving
  To light thy lonely path, to make it blest.
Yea, God remains, though suns are daily dying,—
  A gracious God, who marks the sparrow's fall;
He listens while thine aching heart is sighing;
  He hears and answers when His children call;
His love shall fill the void when death assails,—
The one, eternal God, who never fails.[3]

[1] J. Flew, *Studies in Browning*, 23.
[2] A. M. Fairbairn
[3] William Ordway Partridge.

1. What man needs is a permanent consciousness of the eternal God as a daily presence, the very atmosphere in which the soul lives, moves, and has its being. To this, two movements are necessary, one from God to man, one from man to God.

There's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;
No suns and moons though e'er so bright
Avail to stop me; splendour-proof
I keep the broods of stars aloof:
For I intend to get to God,
For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
I lay my spirit down at last.[1]

(1) God's movement is one in fact and essence, though manifold in form and manifestation—Love. There is truth Divine and universal in that saying of the Psalmist—"Thy gentleness hath made me great." All man's greatness comes from God's gentleness. Were He wroth, our spirits would fail before Him; but He remains merciful, and we endure. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." His heart, boundless as space, infinite as eternity, beats with mercy; and the eternal God around us means simply, Man is enveloped in eternal love.

¶ Two little girls were playing with their dolls, and singing—

Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast,
There, by His love o'ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.

Mother was busy writing, only stopping to listen to the little ones' talk:

"Sister, how do you know you are safe?" asked Nellie, the younger of the two.

"Because I am holding Jesus, with both my hands, tight," replied her sister.

"That's not safe," said the other. "Suppose Satan came along and cut your two hands off!"

Little sister looked troubled, dropped dolly, and thought.

[1] Browning, *Johannes Agricola in Meditation.*

Suddenly her face shone with joy. "Oh, I forgot! Jesus is holding me, and Satan can't cut off His hands; so I am safe."[1]

The child, that to its mother clings,
  Lies not all safely on her breast,
Till she her arm around it flings,
  Sweetly caressing and caressed:
    Ev'n so, my God, Thy mighty arms,
    Not my poor Faith, shield me from harms.

I bless Thy Name for every grace,
  Wherewith Thou dost enrich Thine own;
Yea, I would seek each day to trace
  Myself more like my Master grown:
    Yet, O my God, Thy mighty arms,
    Not my faint Love, shield me from harms.[2]

(2) But, on the other hand, let us not forget that the movement from man to God is as needful as the movement from God to man. The one, like the other, is a movement of love; yet with a difference. Divine pity moves down to all men; but only from filial hearts does human trust move up to God. The Fatherhood is universal; but only where the sonship is consciously realized can the spirit cry, "Abba, Father!" His loving-kindness falls on us like incense by night.

¶ The Divine Father is not the same to all devout men; He is to some more of a daily Presence, more of a permanent Friend; and this larger sense of God rises from a larger need and conscious use of Him in the soul. Vacancies made in the heart are often only rooms in it swept and beautified for God; and His presence at once glorifies the chamber thus prepared, sheds a mellow light back upon the past, and splendid hopes forward upon the future. Were it possible to reduce a pious soul to a consciousness of only two beings—first and pre-eminently of God, next and feebly of self—then it were possible to endow that soul with the supremest happiness possible to a creature; and the more nearly any man approaches to that consciousness the more blessed will he be. Of a truth, he is happy who can say, "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."[3]

[1] W. Armstrong.
[2] A. B. Grosart, *Songs of the Day and Night*, 12.
[3] A. M. Fairbairn.

2. God is a dwelling-place (1) to the nation, and (2) to the individual.

(1) The words were spoken, as all the greatest utterances of the Old Testament were spoken, to a people. The hope of the Israelite was a national hope. His fathers had known God and done their work and passed to their rest. He in his turn was allowed to know God and do his share of work and be buried with his fathers, leaving children and children's children to carry the work still further forward till at last it should reach its glorious consummation. The nation lived on and expanded and developed, blessed when it feared the Lord, punished when it forgot Him. Thousands and tens of thousands of its sons and daughters passed, but the nation still lived on, and learned to look for its perfect glory in the future, when the king Messiah should reign in righteousness over the whole earth, sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem. This was the ideal of the great poets and prophets of the Jewish people. It was a national and not an individual hope.

In times of critical strain and trial to civilization and the State, amid great political and social troubles and changes, let us not fail to remember and realize that the eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. It is not our decrees and institutions that are upholding the world, but the everlasting laws—another name for the everlasting arms. Our refuge in times of distress is not parliaments and governments and compromising politicians, but the eternal God. Our rulers and governors may help or hinder progress, but they do not decide the supreme and final issue of things. There is another Providence in affairs than the human providence. This world is, after all, God's world. Let us not, therefore, lose courage and hope because in the complications of disintegration and change we do not see what is to follow. In all ages, men, bewildered by the vision of great changes, have pronounced the doom of the world because they were not able to see or understand the process of its salvation. Let us not be fearful even if the worst happens. The worst that can happen is often the best for the world. Jerusalem destroyed is better than Jerusalem saved, and the fall of the Roman Empire better for the moral health of the peoples of the earth than its continuance.

¶ The children of Israel had no other, and therefore if God were not their dwelling-place, they were houseless. Pilgrims of the weary foot, they found no city to dwell in; at eventide they pitched their tents, but they struck them again in the morning; the trumpet sounded and they were up and away; if they were in a comfortable valley for one day, yet that relentless trumpet bade them resume their wearisome march through the wilderness in the morning; and perhaps they thought they lingered longest where an encampment was least desirable. Nevertheless they always had a dwelling-place in their God. If I might use such a description without seeming to be fanciful, I would say that the great cloudy canopy which covered them all day long from the heat of the sun was their roof-tree, and that the blazing pillar which protected them by night was their family fireside.[1]

(2) But if the national reference of these words is their primary reference, yet we are justified in giving them a further and more personal reference in the light of the Christian revelation.

Sooner or later every son of man is taught the lesson of his own insufficiency, of his need of a strength he does not find in himself, and of a shelter and support which his fellows cannot give, and no earthly interest or object can yield. The larger and more varied his experience of the world and life, and the more deeply he feels and thinks, the more does he realize the assurance of the Divine protection and care to be the most pressing and imperious of all his practical needs. Of all substitutes for God—wealth, comfort, amusement, music, beauty, learning, friendship, love, philanthropy—he must say, at least in all his most searching and critical experiences, "Miserable comforters are ye all!" To state the fundamental facts of human life is, indeed, to affirm religion. In the generalized experience of mankind lies the real basis of religion. And all religion must somehow have its beginning and its end in God. Religion is God; God is religion.

¶ The ancient words interpret and give immortal expression to a universal and indestructible need of humanity. They were true before they were written, and they would be true if they had not been written in the sacred book of religion. Centuries have passed away and generations have come and gone, but they still lay upon us their solemn spell, and we continue to use them, as we do all the great words of the Bible, because they find us, divine

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

our hearts for us, and utter what in us is but faintly felt and dimly thought with the clear and certain sound of complete conviction, and with the energy of a faith that quickens and strengthens our wavering trusts and hopes.[1]

¶ The infinities of space and time are like boundless deserts, silent, void, till filled with a personal God and Father; but once He lives in and through them, they become warm, vital, throbbing, like hearts pulsing with tides of infinite emotion rushing towards us and breaking into the music of multitudinous laughter and tears. The sky above is no longer space gleaming with stars; but filling it, round the stars, round and through the world, in and about each individual man, is God, daily touching us, daily loving us, giving us life and being in Himself. The Eternities behind and before us are no longer dark, empty, or, at best, a grim procession of births and deaths; they are a living, loving God, from whom man came, to whom he returns. And that Eternal God makes all things secure, restful, blessed. No moment, either here or hereafter, can ever be without God; therefore in none can the good man be otherwise than happy. What is beyond death is not beyond God. He is there as here; and so, whether we live or die, the eternal God is our refuge, and underneath us are the everlasting arms.[2]

O Name, all other names above,
  What art Thou not to me,
Now I have learned to trust Thy love
  And cast my care on Thee!

What is our being but a cry,
  A restless longing still,
Which Thou alone canst satisfy,
  Alone Thy fulness fill!

Thrice blessèd be the holy souls
  That lead the way to Thee,
That burn upon the martyr-rolls
  And lists of prophecy.

And sweet it is to tread the ground
  O'er which their faith hath trod;
But sweeter far, when Thou art found,
  The soul's own sense of God!

[1] J. Hunter. [2] A. M. Fairbairn.

The thought of Thee all sorrow calms;
Our anxious burdens fall;
His crosses turn to triumph-palms,
Who finds in God his all.[1]

II.

Underneath are the Everlasting Arms.

God surrounds His children on all sides: they dwell in Him. The passage before us shows that the Lord is *above* them, for we read, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky." Assuredly He is *around* them, for "the eternal God is thy refuge"; and He is *before* them, for "He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them." Here, according to the text, the Lord is also *under* His saints, for "underneath are the everlasting arms." "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations," and by Thee we are everywhere surrounded as the earth by the atmosphere.

Within thy circling power I stand;
On every side I find thy hand;
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,
I am surrounded still with God.

1. The meaning is that God is our support, and our support just when we begin to sink. We want support when we are sinking, and the arms being "underneath" implies that this support is given just when we are going down. At certain seasons the Christian sinks very low in humiliation. He has a deep sense of his own sin; he is humbled before God, till he scarce knows how to lift up his face and pray, because he appears, in his own sight, so abject, so mean, so base, so worthless. Well, let him remember that when he is at his worst "underneath are the everlasting arms." Sin may sink him ever so low, but the great atonement is still under all. Here is a text which proves it: "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." You may have gone very low, but you can never have gone so low as "the

[1] Frederick Lucian Hosmer.

uttermost." Here is another: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Have you plunged into nearly every kind of sin; have you gone into "all manner of blasphemy"? Even if you have, it may be forgiven, so that this promise goes underneath you. The love of God, the power of the blood, and the prevalence of the intercession, are deeper down than sin with all its hell-born vileness can ever sink the sinner, while breath is in his nostrils.

I dare approach that Heaven
Which has not bade a living thing despair,
Which needs no code to keep its grace from stain,
But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
Desist and be forgiven.[1]

¶ "Underneath are the everlasting arms." That means Personality. That means an all-enfolding, all-embracing love. That means power, the power of the right arm of the Most High. That means redemption, an arm that is not shortened that it cannot save; not "shortened" by any material limitations or physical obstacles. It is not shortened that it cannot save. It can reach down through all defects of being, through all taints of blood, through all grossness of the flesh, through all warpings of the will, and corruptions of the mind and heart; it can get within, to the mysterious soul and core of all character, the springs of all conduct—"underneath are the everlasting arms."[2]

2. The word "underneath" has never been used in the Bible before, and it is never used again. It is of its own order; a word big with meaning and suggestiveness. It is the index to a whole system of thought, philosophical and theological. No solitary word, perhaps, could imply more than this. It opens to us the attitude of wonder and reverent faith in which the deepest minds have pondered what we call to-day the phenomenal; the things that are seen, that strike upon the senses of touch and taste, sight and sound. Such deep minds, brooding over phenomena, have never been satisfied with merely registering those properties and qualities of the material world which they can test and know. They have divided and subdivided matter till they have reduced it to its tiniest possible elements, and then have been conscious that their world and

[1] Browning, *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.* [2] C. S. Horne.

thought end in a note of interrogation after all. It is all summed up, let us say, in this word "underneath."

¶ It has been said that "the great contribution of science to the sum of modern belief has been that underneath phenomena is that which is everlasting." During "the wonderful century" the men of science cleaved the rocks, penetrated the skies, scanned the hidden depths, looked into the secrets of nature, brought to light strange knowledge, and set much wisdom in order; and the strangest and most wonderful discovery of all is that the temporal rests on the eternal, that every commonest thing we see, and every commonest thing we handle, has beneath it the everlasting which becomes clear to patient thinking.

I heard my father say he understood it was
A building, people built as soon as earth was made
Almost, because they might forget (they were afraid)
Earth did not make itself, but came of Somebody.
They laboured that their work might last, and show thereby
He stays, while we and earth, and all things come and go.
Come whence? Go whither? That, when come and gone, we know
Perhaps, but not while earth and all things need our best
Attention: we must wait and die to know the rest.
Ask, if that's true, what use in setting up the pile?
To make one fear and hope: remind us, all the while
We come and go, outside there's Somebody that stays.[1]

3. When do we most need to know that underneath are the everlasting arms?

(1) *When we have reached a state of special joy and exaltation in our religious life.*—Sometimes God takes His servants and puts them on the pinnacle of the temple. Satan does it sometimes: God does it too — puts His servants up on the very pinnacle, where they are so full of joy that they scarce know how to contain themselves, whether in the body or out of the body they cannot tell. Well, now, suppose they should fall! for it is so easy for a man, when full of ecstasy and ravishment, to make a false step and slip. They are safe enough, as

[1] Browning, *Fifine at the Fair.*

safe as though they were in the Valley of Humiliation, for underneath are the arms of God.

¶ Suffering has been long acknowledged as an indispensable factor in the building up of souls; the place of love and happiness is less secure. It is at least possible that there are stunted souls who cannot converse fully with the Divine Father till they have had ampler draughts from the breasts of natural joy.[1]

It's O my heart, my heart,
To be out in the sun and sing!
To sing and shout in the fields about,
In the balm and the blossoming.

Sing loud, O bird in the tree;
O bird, sing loud in the sky,
And honey-bees blacken the clover seas:
There are none of you glad as I.

The leaves laugh low in the wind,
Laugh low with the wind at play;
And the odorous call of the flowers all
Entices my soul away!

For O but the world is fair, is fair:
And O but the world is sweet!
I will out in the gold of the blossoming mould,
And sit at the Master's feet.

And the love my heart would speak,
I would fold in the lily's rim,
That the lips of the blossom, more pure and meek,
May offer it up to Him.

Then sing in the hedgerow green, O thrush,
O skylark, sing in the blue;
Sing loud, sing clear, that the King may hear,
And my soul shall sing with you![2]

(2) *When we are specially depressed and in fear.*—There are times when the burdens of life's unintelligible secret rest upon us with a weight almost too heavy to be borne. There are so many things which it seems to us infinitely important that we should

[1] Anna Bunston, *The Porch of Paradise*, xi.
[2] Ina Donna Coolbrith.

know, but about which we yet know almost nothing. Mystery circumscribes our little lives as with a wall of adamant; we can hardly advance one single step in thought without dashing ourselves against it; we know not what we are, we know not whence we came, we know not whither we are going, and none can tell us. We cry aloud for surer knowledge, and while to the forward and presumptuous there comes back no answer except the echo of their own voice, even for humble and faithful questioners there is only the whisper, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." There is silence and there is darkness. Our vaunted science cannot break that silence and cannot dissipate that gloom.

The eternal God is our refuge from the unsearchable mystery of life. We cannot escape from mystery. It grows with our growing knowledge. What a world this is in which we live, and how awful in some of its aspects is our life in it! Does it not require something more than our little systems and schemes to keep the mind and soul in strength and peace in the midst of this troubled world and troubled life? Where else can we find the sense of shelter and security than where Moses found it long ago? "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Let us yield nothing to our fears. That the Unknown and the Unknowable may be trusted is the message of religion. Our discipleship to Jesus Christ inspires this lofty confidence in the beneficence of the universe, in a universe essentially good and making for goodness—a confidence which is the anticipation of much that modern knowledge is now slowly declaring. In the companionship and fellowship of the Son of God we know that where His trust was in Gethsemane and on Calvary ours can ever rest. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

¶ Often as a child I have trembled to cross at night the courtyard of a lonely country mill. Every little object that moonlight or starlight revealed in other than natural proportions was a source of fear—seemed to hide shapes terrible to childish flesh and blood. But if my little hand was laid in the large hand of my father, I could cross the courtyard as gleefully and carelessly at night as at noonday. So, with our spirits held in the hands of the eternal God, who is above, around, and before, the dark places of Life, Death, and the great For Ever become light; and, trusting where

we cannot see, our steps are firm, when otherwise they would falter and fail.[1]

¶ I suppose some brethren have neither much elevation nor much depression. I could almost wish to share their peaceful life, for I am much tossed up and down, and although my joy is greater than that of most men, my depression of spirit is such as few can have any idea of. This week has been in some respects the crowning week of my life, but it closed with a horror of great darkness, of which I will say no more than this—I bless God that at my worst, underneath me I found the everlasting arms.[2]

¶ Till last night I never knew what depression was. I had no illness; one or two things had happened to grieve me, but still they were comparatively slight; but I never felt so thoroughly downcast about myself and all the world, or so bitter and serious a struggle within me. It tore me through and through, yet it was a great mercy and a special answer to prayer; for having previously felt my own indifference and want of real sense of danger, I had entreated to be bruised and brought low to feel the burthen, that I might appreciate what deliverance might be, and it was granted; consequently this morning I felt such as I had never felt before at the whole service and communion. I never till then had an adequate notion of the power and beauty of our Liturgy, and, on the other hand, of its inferiority to the Word of God. I gained some faint idea of what the Bible was; I *felt* the glorious depth of the declaration, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept," a passage which I had merely understood before.[3]

Dark and sad the hours have been
  In the valley and shade of Death,
Where no light mine eyes have seen
  But the far, cold stars of faith.

And my heart with haunting fears
  Almost sank into despair;
Yet the harvest of my years
  Mostly has been gathered there.

(3) *When sorrow has come in upon us like a flood.*—By a strange and stern law of compensation, which equalizes the distribution of pain, where the material loss is the less felt the heart's loss is often the greater. No hunger, no cold, no nakedness enters this house

[1] A. M. Fairbairn.
[2] C. H. Spurgeon.
[3] F. J. A. Hort, *Life and Letters*, i. 36.

by reason of the new record in the registry of death. Externally, materially, all is as before. But there is the more room and scope for the agony of bereavement; there is the less possibility of assuagement by the good offices of others. Gifts can do nothing here to help; and words, we know, are often less kind than silence. The stranger cannot intermeddle; no anxious effort we can make can mitigate the bitterness.

¶ A king once planted in his garden a beautiful rose-tree, and bade his gardener so tend and train it as to make its flowers the richest and loveliest possible. The tree grew and flourished, and year by year blushed into blossoms of manifold beauty. But it sent out so many shoots, formed so many buds, that its very fertility threatened to injure the quality of its flowers. So the gardener removed the shoots, pruned away the buds, till the tree seemed to bleed all over in loss and pain; but the wounds healed, the sap and strength ran up to those buds that were spared, and when the season of ripeness was come, the roses were lovelier and sweeter than ever—most meet of all in the garden to be carried into the palace of the great king, to fill its galleries and chambers with delicious and grateful fragrance.

God gives us love. Something to love
He lends us; but, when love is grown
To ripeness, that on which it throve
Falls off, and love is left alone.

But it is left alone that it may be the one perfect bond between the human and the Divine, the fragrant sacrifice that rejoices God, the glorious beauty that makes man a source and seat of joy for ever.

If all my years were summer, could I know
What my Lord means by His "made white as snow"?
If all my days were sunny, could I say,
"In His fair land He wipes all tears away"?
If I were never weary could I keep
Close to my heart, "He gives His lovèd sleep"?
Were no graves mine, might I not come to deem
The life eternal but a baseless dream?
My winter, yea, my tears, my weariness,
Even my graves may be His way to bless;
I call them ills, yet that can surely be
Nothing but good that shows my Lord to me.

(4) *In the fear of death.*—When, at last, each of us is laid on the bed of death, and the moment has come when we must enter into the presence of God and see our souls, with every mask of hypocrisy, conscious or unconscious, torn away, see our souls as they are and as God sees them; when we are sinking naked and possessionless into the grave; when we feel the mist in our eyes, the fog in our throats, and the voices of our friends no longer reach us, or if they do we have no strength even to sigh back an answer or to return the pressure of the hand—what can help us then? Alone we must enter that dark valley—no troops of friends can accompany us there; alone must our souls seem to sink downwards as through unfathomable seas of gloom. Which of us can tell how soon that awful hour may be awaiting us? And when it comes, how will every one of the things which we have desired on earth seem to shrink into utter insignificance in comparison with "the one thing needful," which, perhaps, we may have altogether neglected. When the solid earth itself seems to be crumbling under our feet, when we lie helpless in the grasp of that inexorable force, there is one thing which gives to the Christian not only hope, but "peace which passeth all understanding"; it is when we feel that for us death can have no sting, and the grave no victory, because the eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

¶ Mr. B., an eager business man in middle life, declared that, till he found a way of escape, to go to bed was to go to hell. Just as he was about to lose consciousness there had been almost always presented to his mind the idea and sensation of himself falling through boundless space. The perspiration stood on his face as he avowed that the phrase "bottomless pit" was to him overwhelming in its suggestiveness. This torture he had begun to experience while he was yet a schoolboy. At the school prayers on Sunday night the boys had always sung Ken's evening hymn. The lines—

> Teach me to live that I may dread
> The grave as little as my bed

had seemed terrible in their irony to one who dreaded nothing so much as his bed. Relief had not come to him until he was well on in manhood. Strolling one evening in a country churchyard, his eyes were arrested by the words on a gravestone "Underneath

are the Everlasting Arms," and in a flash of inspiration he saw his safety. That very night, as the solid platform of the earth was falling away from him, "he rested on the promise"—for so he described his mental attitude—and he affirmed that since that time he had always at his command a sense of physical comfort and safety upon which he could sleep as on a pillow.[1]

The embers of the day are red
Beyond the murky hill.
The kitchen smokes: the bed
In the darkling house is spread:
The great sky darkens overhead,
And the great woods are shrill.
So far have I been led,
Lord, by Thy will:
So far I have followed, Lord, and wondered still.

The breeze from the embalmèd land
Blows sudden toward the shore,
And claps my cottage door.
I hear the signal, Lord—I understand.
The night at Thy command
Comes. I will eat and sleep and will not question more.[2]

[1] *The Spectator*, July 2, 1910.
[2] R. L. Stevenson, *Songs of Travel*.

The Death and Burial of Moses.

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The Death and Burial of Moses.

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.—Deut. xxxiv. 5, 6.

The more carefully we study the Old Testament, the more we shall be convinced that it contains a development of truth, not merely by spoken revelations, but through events and incidents divinely arranged, and made the subjects of thought to those ancient believers, under the teaching of God's Spirit. These incidents are planted like seeds in the popular heart, and grow up slowly into leaf and flower in recognized doctrines. This was Christ's own method of instruction in His miracles and parables, and we may expect to find it in the Divine history throughout. No one can close the Old Testament and open the New without seeing that, during the interval, immense progress had been made in the unfolding of religious truth. The expectation of a Redeemer and a redemption had become clear and concentrated, and the belief in an eternal life, and in the resurrection, was held by many. There is, we believe, no satisfactory way of accounting for this but by the work of God's own Spirit, in the heart of thoughtful men, using for His instrument the revelation which had already been given. Let us take the account of the death and burial of Moses, and seek to show how it was fitted to be such a source of fruitful reflection to the Old Testament Church.

The text is in three parts—

I. The death of Moses was at God's command: "So Moses died according to the word of the Lord."

II. His death took place before Israel entered the land of promise: "Moses died there in the land of Moab."

III. He was buried by God and his sepulchre is unknown: "He buried him in the valley, but no man knoweth of his sepulchre."

I.

Death at the Command of God.

"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord." The Hebrew is "according to the mouth of Jehovah"; the meaning is "according to the command of Jehovah." The same expression is translated in the case of Aaron's death "at the commandment of the Lord" (Num. xxxiii. 38).

¶ *Mouth* in the sense of *command* is a common Hebrew idiom; nevertheless the Jews understood it here literally, and from the paraphrase in the Targum arose the Rabbinic legend that Moses died by the kiss of God.

i. The Common Destiny.

We live to die. When or where, it is vain to inquire; but that we *must* pass through the gates of death, no room is left for us to doubt. It is the common lot. Death is life's shadow. It is not coeval with life, but it is coexistent with it. Wherever you find the one in this world of ours, you find the other. There is not a tree that grows, not a bird that sings, not a flower that blooms, not a child that laughs, not a man that toils, not anything that lives, but is destined to die. So Moses the servant of the Lord died.

There is no pause in the succession. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever,"—that is, throughout these successive generations of men. *It* abides, but *they* are gone. The mount from whose flaming summit the voice of God came forth still looks down upon the depths around it, and the dreary wilderness beyond it; but Moses, the tribes, and the tents of Israel have disappeared. The Sea of Tiberias still lies embedded, bright and blue, amid the hills of Galilee; but the men who crowded its shores to listen to the voice of One who spake as never man spake are nowhere to be found—all are "gathered to their fathers."

Leaves, leaves, dead leaves of autumn everywhere!
They reddened all the floor of Fontainebleau
And rustled under every heedless foot.
They choked the gutters of the streets and filled
The carts of scavengers. They danced before
My steps, an eerie ghostly dance, and touched
My cheek and wailed about my ears. "Brief life
Is theirs," said one who, passing, deemed he knew
My thought. "Brief life?" I captured one and read
A long, long story on its rusty face,
An age-long tale of life upon the tree
Alternating with death upon the ground.
I saw the forest dropping wintry tears
On leaves slow lapsing back to formlessness.
I saw the little sun, the little frost
Of verdant life, the fall, the death again.

The myriads and myriads of leaves
That make the forest mould cried out to me:
"Infinity, eternity we taste
Who have not breath enough to die, but what
Of man?" The roadway echoed to my steps:
"Infinity, eternity, but what
Of man?" And when I had attained the town
Each foot that hurried through the falling night
Beat out the words: "To-day the little sun
The little frost of life, but yesterday
We were not, and to-morrow shall not be—
Infinity, eternity, but what
Of man?"[1]

¶ In the old times, before the settlements in the great northwest, when the fur companies would establish here and there a great trading post and send out their trappers to all parts of the country, trails were made in every direction, but they all ended at the post. North, south, east, west, for hundreds of miles in every direction, along large rivers, following small streams into the mountains, crossing lakes, searching through deep canyons, the trails would wind, but you could begin a hundred miles away, on any one of them, and however devious its course might be, it would end at the trader's camp. The grave is the end of the trail of this world's life. A man may start where he will. He may climb the heights of wealth or traverse the deep canyons of poverty. He may follow up the mountains of hard struggle or

[1] Anna Bunston, *The Porch of Paradise*, 3.

paddle his canoe on a stream of idleness. But when you get to the end of the trail, it is all the same. It is an open grave. Whether he brings many pelts there or few, however great or small have been the spoils of his life chase is of no account, for the grave is too narrow to hold any of them. We brought nothing with us into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. God help us that we may learn over again the old, old lesson that we learn so often and forget so soon—that we are with rapid feet following the trail to the grave. As we go over the trail but once, we never know how near the end is. It may be a long way off. It may be just over the hill.[1]

ii. At the Word of God.

All life in the universe, our existence now and for ever, depends upon the Divine will. No one ever died a moment sooner than God designed, or lived a moment longer. We are entirely in His hands. He gave us birth. He willed our being. He placed us here, according to His wisdom, as was best for us. He takes us hence when it is best for us. We talk of accidental deaths, and premature graves. The language has really no meaning; it expresses notions, not truths. What are chances to us are purposes with God. Our course, from first to last, is ordered by Him. We not only come but go at His bidding. He gives life when He pleases, and when He chooses He takes it away. "All the days of my *appointed* time will I wait, till my change come."

From out what Silent Land
I came, on Earth to stand
  And learn life's little art,
Is not in me to say:
I know I did not stray,—
  Was *sent*; to come, my part.

And down what Silent Shore
Beyond yon little door
  I pass, I cannot tell;
I know I shall not stray,
Nor ever lose the way,—
  Am *sent*; and all is well.[2]

¶ There is an inscription on the tombstone of a little child in one of our country churchyards, as follows:—

[1] L. A. Banks. [2] William Channing Gannett.

"Who plucked that flower?" cried the gardener, as he walked through the garden. His fellow-servant answered, "The *Master*," and the gardener held his peace.

"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because *thou* didst it."[1]

iii. The Death to die.

Moses came to his death with courage and confidence. The reason for this is an open secret. Many years before, he had made the supreme choice of his life. He had chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy for a season the pleasures of sin. And all the years of his experience since had but confirmed that great choice. He had given himself over to be guided by the Spirit of God. He had communed with God in joy and in sorrow, in hours of glorious victory and amid the gloom of stinging defeat; he had come to trust God with all his heart and soul; with every drop of his blood he was sure that God meant him good. Now, though his strength was unabated and his eye not dim and he must have had many natural desires to complete the work on which he had laboured so long, and to see his people safely housed in the Promised Land, he went without a word of complaint or of doubt to lay his body in the grave.

¶ My own feeling now is that everything which has hitherto happened to me, and been done by me, whether well or ill, has been fitting me to take greater fortune more prudently, and to do better work more thoroughly. And just when I seem to be coming out of school—very sorry to have been such a foolish boy, yet having taken a prize or two, expecting now to enter upon some more serious business than cricket, I am dismissed by the Master I hoped to serve, with a—"That's all I want of you, sir."[2]

¶ I was sitting in my study one Saturday evening, when a message came to me that one of the godliest among the shepherds who tended their flocks upon our Highland hills was dying, and wanted to see his minister. Without loss of time I crossed the wide heath to his comfortable little cottage. When I entered the low room I found the old shepherd propped up with pillows and breathing with such difficulty that it was apparent he was near his end. As soon as the door was closed he turned his grey eyes upon me and said, in a voice shaken with emotion:

[1] J. Davies. [2] A. C. Benson, *Ruskin: A Study in Personality*, 156.

"Minister, I'm dying, and—I'm afraid!" I began at once to repeat the strongest promises with which God's Word furnishes us, but in the midst of them he stopped me. "I ken them a'," he said mournfully; "I ken them a', but somehow, they dinna gie me comfort." I took up the well-worn Bible which lay on his bed and turned to the twenty-third Psalm. I slowly repeated the verse, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." "You have been a shepherd all your life, and you have watched the heavy shadows pass over the valleys and over the hills, hiding for a little while all the light of the sun. Did these shadows ever frighten you?" He looked at me with curious eyes. I continued, "The shadow of death is over you, and it hides for a little the Sun of Righteousness, which shines all the same behind it; but it's only a shadow. Remember, that is what the Psalmist calls it—a shadow that will pass; and when it has passed, you will see the everlasting hills in their unclouded glory!" The old shepherd covered his face with his trembling hands, and for a few minutes maintained an unbroken silence; then, turning upon me a face now bright with an almost supernatural radiance, he exclaimed, lifting his hands reverently to heaven: "Ay, ay! I see it a' now. Death is only a shadow, with Christ behind it—a shadow that will pass."

When death is coming near,
When thy heart shrinks in fear
And thy limbs fail,
Then raise thy hands and pray
To Him who smooths thy way
Through the dark vale.

Seest thou the eastern dawn,
Hear'st thou in the red morn
The angel's song?
Oh, lift thy drooping head,
Thou who in gloom and dread
Hast lain so long.

Death comes to set thee free;
Oh, meet him cheerily
As thy true friend,
And all thy fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
Thy penance end.[1]

[1] De la Motte Fouqué.

iv. Death less than Life.

1. Scripture speaks much of life and little of the manner of dying. Men imagine that the hour of death is the greatest test of faith in God, and thus they are not satisfied unless they know that in the last hours of a great and good man that faith shone out with unusual splendour. The Bible speaks of the battle of life as the real test of faith; and having told us that its heroes fought that battle faithfully, it does not stay to tell us whether their faith flashed out brightly in the end. Men think of death as a dark and awful mystery to be undergone with all possible heroism, and thus they inquire eagerly after death-bed experiences, and delight to dwell on triumphant departures. The Bible speaks of the death of the good as of the entrance into the blessed presence of Him whom they had served here; and having told us that His servants served Him, having spoken of their Divine heroism in living and doing, it seldom describes the close of their course, leaving us to feel that God took care of them then. Thus we have no long description of the death of Moses. The book, indeed, does record his last words to the people, but in them he speaks not of his own feelings, but of God; he does not attract their attention to his experience, but shows them how God had guided every step of their way. And thus, in speaking of a man whom it describes as one of the greatest prophets of all time, God's Book says with sublime simplicity, "So Moses died, and the Lord buried him."

¶ Jewish, Mussulman, and Christian traditions crowd in to fill up the blank. "Amidst the tears of the people, the women beating their breasts and the children giving way to uncontrolled wailing, he withdrew. At a certain point in his ascent he made a sign to the weeping multitude to advance no farther, taking with him only the elders, the high priest Eliezer, and the general Joshua. At the top of the mountain he dismissed the elders, and then, as he was embracing Eliezer and Joshua, and still speaking to them, a cloud suddenly stood over him, and he vanished in a deep valley." So spoke the tradition as preserved in the language, here unusually pathetic, of Josephus. Other wilder stories told of the Divine kiss which drew forth his expiring spirit; others of the "Ascension of Moses" amidst the contention of good and evil spirits over his body. The Mussulmans, regardless of the actual scene of his death, have raised to

him a tomb on the western side of the Jordan, frequented by thousands of Mussulman devotees. But the silence of the sacred narrative refuses to be broken. "In" that strange land, "the land of Moab, Moses the servant of the Lord died, according to the word of the Lord." "He buried him in 'a ravine' in the land of Moab, over against the idol temple of Peor." Apart from his countrymen, honoured by no funeral obsequies, visited by no grateful pilgrimages, "no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."[1]

¶ The Bible is the book of *life*. Its pages teem with biography; they contain but scant memorials of death. The only death they describe at length is that of Him who in dying slew death. The very minuteness of the description there shows how unique and all-important it was. Men make more of death than of life as a gauge of character. A few pious sentences spoken then will go far to efface the memory of years of inconsistency. God makes most of life.[2]

"Are saints
Enskied," I asked, "so linked with living men?"
"The brightest lily of the Lenten woods,"
He said "arrayed in livery of the sun,
Depends upon a buried bulb; the bulb
Depends on mediating leaves that bring
The breath of Heaven to the dust of earth;
And so the Church in glory, rest and war
Has triune life or none. Can clouds exist
Without the sun or sea? Would light and sound
Survive if air were dead? All things that are
Interdepend eternally. Herein
Consists the awfulness of human life,
That no man knows the confines of a sin,
The generations of a virtuous deed;
And hence the obligation to entreat
All men with tender charity, since al.
Are victims if offenders too; and oft
The fractures of the wicked are derived
From flaws of saints. And since one perfect Life
Can leaven all, perhaps one sinning soul
Can stay the bliss of all the Church of God."[3]

2. But was Moses' life so profound a failure? The history before us gives us the answer. The purpose that Moses might

[1] A. P. Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, i. 178.
[2] F. B. Meyer.
[3] Anna Bunston, *The Porch of Paradise*, 32.

not carry out was to be accomplished by Joshua, his successor. His life, therefore, had not failed; the hope he had thought to realize was yet to be realized in another way—for his labour had inspired a man who had caught his spirit, and was to finish the work he had begun. In that knowledge Moses might rest.

There is a spiritual connexion between men. One race is united by spiritual ties of influence to the succeeding race; age is joined by bonds of influence to age. Man is this bond for ever to future generations. He dies, and the spirit of his life is caught by his successors—so even here he "fulfils his course." Therefore no life is ever lost, no holy purpose ever really fails. The life of Stephen, the first martyr, seemed like a hurried dream; he had just entered God's army when in the first conflict he died. Men might say "he died before his time." The Church made great lamentation over him. Its strongest soldier had gone. His life seemed vain. But his spirit entered the soul of St. Paul! So with the martyrs of the first ages. Their spirit lives yet. The mantles of departing prophets fall on other men, and clothe these with power to accomplish the work they had to leave unfinished.

¶ To labour and not to see the end of our labours; to sow and not to reap; to be removed from this earthly scene before our work has been appreciated, and when it will be carried on not by ourselves, but by others—is a law so common in the highest characters of history, that none can be said to be altogether exempt from its operation. It is true in intellectual matters as well as in spiritual; and one of the finest applications of any passage in the Mosaic history is that first made by Cowley, and enlarged by Lord Macaulay, to the great English philosopher, who

> Did on the very border stand
> Of the blessed Promised Land;
> And from the mountain's top of his exalted wit
> Saw it himself, and show'd us it;
> But life did never to one man allow
> Time to discover worlds and conquer too.[1]

Each generation, however much it may seem to be absorbed in its own interests, works, not really for itself, but for a generation to come. That sense of incompleteness, of disappointment, which

[1] A. P. Stanley.

so often hangs like a cloud over the best work—work which has conscience, enthusiasm, and duty in it—is not final, it is only the veil which hides the land of promise from the gaze of the tired worker. Moses had to lay down his life's work and forgo his own reward just as it seemed within his grasp, but yet he found his vindication in the greatness of a people whom, more than anyone, he had striven to make. He had to let go all the vital interests with which his life was bound up, as it were before his time, and yet time proved that he was right.

¶ When we have done, as Moses did, what we have power and wisdom for, God, in the order of the world, takes the work out of our hands and gives it to another who will do the rest better than we could do it. If we lived on, the work would then be unfinished. It is by our death that it comes to a finish, in the hands of another. A porcelain cup passes, in a great manufactory, from hand to hand till it is completed. A young hand, seeing the cup taken from him without the handle, might think, "Alas, why may I not finish? My work is spoiled." He does not know that another man in the next room will put on the handle better than he.[1]

> We are to die; but even I perceive
> 'Tis not a very hard thing so to die.
> My cousin of the pale-blue tearful eyes,
> Poor Cesca, suffers more from one day's life
> With the stern husband; Tisbe's heart goes forth
> Each evening after that wild son of hers,
> To track his thoughtless footstep through the streets:
> How easy for them both to die like this!
> I am not sure that I could live as they.[2]

II.

Death in the Desert.

Moses' time had come. But he was none the less with God. And when he felt the time drew near, he went to the top of a high mountain whence he could see the land of Israel's heritage. Many have wished—it is especially a prophet's wish—to be alone in death, alone in the silence of nature, high up, nearer the stars, where one may be able in the absence of the noise of earth, to

[1] S. A. Brooke.

[2] Browning, *A Soul's Tragedy*.

realize the nearness of the invisible Spirit. So he was carried to the top of Pisgah, and left in solitude on that peak of Pisgah which is called Nebo; and from thence he saw the country promised to his fathers. It is a mighty landscape, and there is scarcely a point in it which did not afterwards become a memory in the history of the Jewish people, scarcely a name which has not some significance in the spiritual history of mankind. There, to the north, lay Gilead and the mountain plateau divided by the ford of Jabbok, rocky plains, hill pastures, forests of oak and pine; and beyond, Gennesaret and Merom, all the wild land on either side of Jordan, crowned by the eternal snows of Hermon; and Lebanon spread its cedars far away; and towards the Great Sea, he saw the cornfields of Esdraelon, the mount of Carmel, Gilboa, and the broken highlands where Ephraim was soon to couch like a lion in his den. Nearer at hand, more to the west, was the plain of Judah, and nearer still the dry limestone rocks of Judah, where, years afterwards, Israel's Jerusalem uprose, even more than Rome, the centre of the imagination of the world. And below, right at his feet, lay the Dead Sea, in its crater-cup of hills, and Jericho in its pastures, and the mountain pass that led to the hill that men afterwards called Zion.

This was the land which the Lord had promised to the fathers, for which he had been yearning, and to which all his work had been directed all these years; and now he is to die, as the text puts it, with such pathetic emphasis, "*there in Moab*," and to have no part in the fair inheritance.

¶ To Moses, so far as we know, the charm of that view—pronounced by the few modern travellers who have seen it to be unequalled of its kind—lay in the assurance that this was the land promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to their seed, the inheritance—with all its varied features of rock and pasture, and forest and desert—for the sake of which he had borne so many years of toil and danger, in the midst of which the fortunes of his people would be unfolded worthily of that great beginning. To us, as we place ourselves by his side, the view swells into colossal proportions as we think how the proud city of palm-trees is to fall before the hosts of Israel; how the spear of Joshua is to be planted on height after height of those hostile mountains; what series of events, wonderful beyond any that had been witnessed in Egypt or in Sinai, would in after ages

be enacted on the narrow crest of Bethlehem, in the deep basin of the Galilean lake, beneath the walls of "Jebus which is Jerusalem."[1]

As Moses looked upon the scene that met his eyes, he thought, "This is the promised land. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob saw it before me. They were but pilgrims in it. I have worked for it; I have come to the edge of it; I may not enter into it." And as he lay there in the deep silence, his first thought was, no doubt, regret. "Why, having done all I could have done, may I not see the end? Would that I could go with my people and share their glory and their conquest! Does God do right to take me away now? I have borne the burden and heat of the day; why should I not taste of the grapes of Eshcol?"

¶ It is the lot of all epoch-making men, of all great constructive and reforming geniuses, whether in the Church or in the world, that they should toil at a task, the full issues of which will not be known until their heads are laid low in the dust. But if, on the one hand, that seems hard, on the other hand there is the compensation of "the vision of the future and all the wonder that shall be" which is granted many a time to the faithful worker ere he closes his eyes. But it is not the fate of epoch-making and great men only; it is the law for our little lives. If these are worth anything, they are constructed on a scale too large to bring out all their results here and now. It is easy for a man to secure immediate consequences of an earthly kind; easy enough for him to make certain that he shall have the fruit of his toil. But quick returns mean small profits; and an unfinished life that succeeds in nothing may be far better than a completed one that has realised all its shabby purposes and accomplished all its petty desires.[2]

That low man seeks a little thing to do,
  Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
  Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
  His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
  Misses an unit.
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
  Let the world mind him!

[1] A. P. Stanley. [2] A. Maclaren.

This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find Him.[1]

What is the meaning, then, of unfulfilled purposes in life? It is evident that Moses felt this as one of the saddest aspects of his departure. The earnest prayer that the Divine sentence should be recalled, and that he should lead his people into their own land, shows how keenly this thought pressed upon him. The answer to that prayer—the permission to behold the land he might not enter—shows this still more powerfully, for it exhibits God's sympathy with the sorrow that filled his heart. And, indeed, if we reflect on his circumstances at that time, we shall find that they must all have brought before him the mysterious fact that the grand purpose of his life was never to be realized. One thought had given meaning to his history for eighty years—the thought of guiding the nation into the land promised to his forefathers. *That* must have cheered him through many a desolate day in the wilderness, and it must have helped him to be calm when the people's murmurings grew loud. The difficulties of their progress, and the apparent disappointment of their hopes would react on him in new power. For difficulties have two effects on men. On the man of feeble purpose they act with a withering might that renders him undecided and desponding; on the man of strong faith and powerful purpose they act like the rocks that, by limiting the space of a torrent, give it greater force—they nerve him to stronger effort, and brace him for more strenuous toil; and every difficulty must thus have inspired the one aim of Moses with fuller energy. His feelings towards the people, too, would exert on that purpose a higher and a holier power. Their welfare had become part of his life. His sympathy with their weakness, their ignorance, their sorrow, must have kindled into burning ardour the desire to bring them to their home. But on the very verge of its accomplishment—on the very border of the land, with its hills in sight—that purpose must be surrendered and he must die.

What was the meaning of his death at that time? The question might have but a feeble interest for us if it were

[1] Browning, *A Grammarian's Funeral*.

not that the facts of life force it upon us daily. Is it not a mystery by which we *all* are baffled—a mystery which in some hours we strive to confront because of its deep sadness, and which at other times seems to darken before us through our useless questionings — that the greatest and holiest purposes men cherish seem never to be attained? The common phrase that speaks of men "dying before their time" is the confession of a riddle which cannot be solved. It met the old heathen who, without the light of Christianity, said, in his simplicity, "Whom the gods love die young." And he has thought but little who has not asked in perplexity, Why should such men die, as if the greatness of their aim had shattered the chain of their earthly life, while those who have no God-given purpose so often live on till a useless old age creeps over them? The truest servants of the Lord come to life's end with one common confession that they have attained but a fragment of their purposes. The Christian Church repeats from age to age the story that its most earnest men are too frequently the first to die; and no Christian ever awoke to the deep conviction that life was not to be spent in selfishness, but in Christ-like effort for man, without discovering that his aim, in this world, is never fulfilled; and that is the world-wide mystery.

¶ His father had several friends, wont to spend an evening hour or two in his study, to which John was now admitted on equal terms. Amongst these was a young advocate, a tall and energetic man, full of vitality, brimming over with good spirits and laughter. He went into the country on some business connected with his profession, slept at a little inn in damp sheets, took a chill, and died of rapid consumption, disappearing from his accustomed place with a suddenness which startled John as if a miracle had taken place before his eyes. The man had been the very embodiment of overflowing health. There had been no natural mounting up to full maturity and gradual decadence to death. In the bloom and vigour of early manhood death smote him and laid him low. That old men should die seemed plain enough; that weakly children should fade from life was grievous, but not mysterious; but that, after all the preparation which youth must undergo to fit the man for life—that, so fitted and equipped, on the very threshold of usefulness and experience, death might leap from an ambuscade and lay him low—*that* pulled him up from all easy-going acceptance of what to-day and

to-morrow had to offer, since the third day might find him face to face with the same dread experience.[1]

¶ A famous historian died, leaving incomplete his one master-work to which he had given all his strength and all his love. He was not afraid of death. He set his affairs in order with great thoughtfulness. He said good-bye to his friends with unbroken courage. But one thing broke his heart. He had not finished his book. The long years spent in gathering knowledge and in solving problems; the patient labour to which he had sacrificed pleasures, and riches, and bodily health; they were never to bear their expected fruit. The bitterness of the thought was too much for his fortitude, and his dying cry was a cry of regret: "My book, my unfinished book!"

¶ The English statesman, Pitt, who gave his life to the task of bringing his country through the great struggle with Napoleon, died of the task at forty-seven years of age. His closing moments were made dark and sad by the thought that he must leave the work undone. They brought to him the news of Napoleon's last victory. He turned his face to the wall, murmuring, "My country! how I leave my country!"

"Go home content, the evening falls,
Day's tired sinews are unbent;
No more the thrush or linnet calls,
The twilight fades, go home content."

"Father, the field is but half-turned,
And yet the spring is well-nigh spent."
"My son, the hour of rest is earned,
The day's work done, go home content."

1. The first answer is that the desire of Moses was unfulfilled because of his sin. One of the great truths which the old law and ordinances given by Moses were intended to burn in on the conscience of the Jew, and through him on the conscience of the world, was that indissoluble connexion between evil done and evil suffered, which reaches its highest exemplification in the death which is the wages of sin. And just as some men that have invented instruments for capital punishment have themselves had to prove the sharpness of their own axe, so the lawgiver, whose message it had been to declare, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," had himself to go up

[1] A. M. Stoddart, *John Stuart Blackie*, i. 22.

alone to the mountain-top to receive in his own person the exemplification of the law that had been spoken by his own lips. He sinned when, in a moment of passion (with many palliations and excuses), he smote the rock that he was bidden to address, and forgot therein, and in his angry words to the rebels, that he was only an instrument in the Divine hand. It was a momentary wavering in a hundred and twenty years of obedience. It was one failure in a life of self-abnegation and suppression. The stern sentence came.

¶ It is pathetic to find him among that great company of martyrs for the public good, those who in order to serve their people have neglected their own characters. Under the stress of public work and the pressure of the stupidity and greed of those whom they have sought to guide, many leaders of men have been tempted, and have yielded to the temptation, to forget the demands of their better nature. But whatever their services to the world, such unfaithfulness does not pass unpunished. They have to bear the penalty, whosoever they be; and Moses was no more an exception than Cromwell or Savonarola was, to mention only some of the nobler examples.[1]

(1) If we ask why that single and apparently trifling disobedience unfitted him to lead the people into the land, while men far more rebellious and with less temptation afterwards became their rulers, I do not know that we can find an adequate reply. It may be that God would show how one act may darken the whole of man's earthly hopes; how the subtle influence of one act of disobedience—because in disobedience lies the germ of all sin—may pervade with its gloom the whole of a man's history, and cause his holiest efforts to fail just at the moment they seem about to succeed. In that we have the hidden source of life's incompleteness unveiled. It may not be true to say that some special and definite sin ever prevents the man who has a great purpose from accomplishing it, but this history points out that the presence of sin has destroyed all the completeness of life, and accounts for all that failure of the holiest aims which saddens and perplexes us.

¶ One little mark under the arm-pit of a plague-sufferer tells the physician that the fatal disease is there. A tiny leaf above ground may reveal deep below the root of a poison-plant. That little deflection, coming as it did at the beginning of the resump-

[1] A. Harper.

tion of his functions by the Lawgiver after seven-and-thirty years of comparative abeyance, and on his first encounter with the new generation that he had to lead, was a very significant indication that his character had begun to yield and suffer from the strain that had been put upon it; and that, in fact, he was scarcely fit for the responsibilities that the new circumstances brought.[1]

(2) People say, "A heavy penalty for a small offence." Yes! But an offence of Moses could not be a small offence. *Noblesse oblige!* The higher a man rises in communion with God, and the more glorious the message and office which are put into his hands, the more intolerable in him is the slightest deflection from the loftiest level. A splash of mud that would never be seen on a navvy's clothes stains the white satin of a bride or the embroidered garment of a noble. And so a little sin done by a loftily endowed and inspired man ceases to be small.

¶ It is one of the laws of the Divine government of the world, that with those to whom God specially draws near He is more rigorous than with others. Amos clearly saw and proclaimed this principle. "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel," he says; "you only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* I will visit upon you all your iniquities" (Amos iii. 1, 2).

(3) We cannot suppose that the sudden outburst of impetuous temper at Meribah—when his spirit was agitated by a fierce whirlwind of wrath, as a storm sweeping down some mountain-rent on an inland lake—could remain long unforgiven. As far as the east is from the west, so far had that transgression been removed. But though the remission was complete, yet the result lingered in his life, and shut him out from an experience which should have been the crown of his career. "The Lord hath put away thy sin," said Nathan to the royal transgressor; "but thy child shall die, and the sword shall not depart out of thy house."

(4) But there is more. Moses was one with Israel. When they sinned he interceded as for himself. When Jehovah made him the offer that He would make of him a great nation, he declined it solely from his love to Israel. He lived for the nation, and for the nation he died. Remember how once he went so far as to say, "If not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast

[1] A. Maclaren.

written." In every way he was of the people, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; Israel was hidden in his heart; and out of that master-passion of sympathy with the people came the weakness which at last made him speak unadvisedly with his lips. They strove with God; and though Moses never yielded a point to them in that wicked contest, yet their unbelief so far influenced him that he spake in anger, and said, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" Then "the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them" (Num. xx. 10, 12). Three times in the Book of Deuteronomy Moses tells the people that the Lord was angry with him for their sakes. It was not so much what Moses did personally that involved him in judgment; but he suffered because of his being mixed up with Israel. As the Lord had spared the people aforetime for Moses' sake, it became necessary that, when he in any measure shared in their great sin of unbelief, he should be chastened for their sake as well as his own. His faith had saved them, and now his unbelief, being backed by theirs, secures for him the sentence of exclusion from the land.

¶ Were not the Israelites much more guilty? Why were they allowed to enter the land from which he was shut out? We are called by Christ's name; we believe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and we ought to be able to see the answer in the Psalmist's words: "They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes." "For their sakes." "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin"; by one man's endurance of the curse we are all redeemed to God. The Christian doctrine of Atonement is neither an evasion of the law affixing penalty to sin, nor an after-thought supplying the deficiencies of that law; it is the doctrine of human life; it is part of the very constitution of society, that we bear the sins of one another, and are helped by one another's endurance of penalty. If we find it hard to believe that God is, righteously and graciously, thus visiting the sins of Israel on Moses, is it not because we have not rightly apprehended the righteousness and grace of God in our own redemption? The constitution of society which makes it inevitable that a man shall share in the transgression of his fellows is an integral part of the law which God "magnified and made honourable" in the

Cross; it is this that made possible Christ's sacrifice and mediation.

2. There is sometimes success in failure, sublimity in defeat. If we will consider it, there is nothing more sublime in the history of Moses than the story of his death. Tried by a worldly standard, it seems a poor and shameful ending to such a life. Who so fit, we might ask, to lead the children of Israel into the promised land as he who had, for their sakes, defied the wrath of Pharaoh; who had led them out of Egypt, and shared with them the wanderings of the wilderness; endured their perversity, and often interceded with God on their behalf? But when we speak thus, the poverty and shame are in our way of judging character and its rewards. Whether is better?—honour, or a resolute and chastened spirit? Who is the nobler man?—he who rejoices in the fulfilment of his hopes, or he who knows how to endure, and see the fruit of disappointment?

¶ If we believe to be a meek and humble man is better than any blare of trumpets or pompous triumph, we shall see that God had provided some better thing for Moses than to lead the tribes into the promised land. To me it seems that the man Moses, with eye undimmed and natural force not abated, resigning to another the office he was still fit to bear, quietly accepting the decree which took his leadership from him, is surrounded with a purer lustre than had ever before rested on him; the ascent of Nebo is more glorious than the descent of Sinai.[1]

Moses, the patriot fierce, became
The meekest man on earth,
To show us how love's quick'ning flame
Can give our souls new birth.

Moses, the man of meekest heart,
Lost Canaan by self-will,
To show, where Grace has done its part,
How sin defiles us still.

Thou, who hast taught me in Thy fear,
Yet seest me frail at best,
O grant me loss with Moses here,
To gain his future rest![2]

¶ There is little that is wise or noble about Ruskin hitherto. It had been a career of unbroken success of a small and self-

[1] A. Mackennal. [2] J. H. Newman.

centred kind; his genius had showed itself in his incredible laboriousness, and in a vitality of immense elasticity and toughness. But not by these things is the world changed! And now he was to be given a new heart. He was to see and to feel; he was to be mocked and derided; he was to wrestle with hateful thoughts; he was to torment himself over the evils of society; he was to build up an elaborate scheme for its amelioration. His scheme was to fail, and not even to fail nobly; it was to be viewed not only with indifference, but with open ridicule and contempt. Yet he was to become, without knowing it, in his humiliation and pain, more august, more pathetic, more noble, more Divine, till he was to appear in the minds of all who cared for purity and goodness and beauty, like a seamed and scarred mountain peak, above the peaceful valleys, cold and lonely and isolated, and yet looking out across the fields of life to some awful sunrise of truth, climbing and glimmering over shining tracts and unknown seas.[1]

> Although you seem to till a thankless soil,
> Your prayers are never vain, nor vain your toil;
> Some fruit you yet may have to cheer your heart,
> In some new epoch you may bear a part;
> But ev'n if now, through your short span of years
> Your work be weary, and no fruit appears,—
> Though, in humility, you look within,
> Deeming your failure the result of sin,—
> It is not so; for still our Father knows
> What each requires—on each He still bestows
> The discipline most needed; still He weighs
> Our work with heavenly scales; our purblind gaze
> Finds failure often where He knows success.[2]

3. One thought remains. The desires of Moses, unfulfilled here, were fulfilled in a higher sense elsewhere. The history before us may be silent, but *we* cannot be silent. By looking at the death of Moses in the light of the revelation brought by Christ we can speak with confidence. Christ redeemed all life —He glorified it all—therefore we may believe that no earnest efforts of this life are ever, for the man himself, really unfulfilled. And if that does not seem to prove their actual fulfilment, we may get some light on the subject by referring to a great law that pervades all the government of God. God leaves none of

[1] A. C. Benson, *Ruskin: A Study in Personality*, 88.
[2] Mackenzie Bell.

His works unfinished. In the world of nature no atom is lost, although we may not see the fulfilment of every existence because of our blindness. In the world of souls we perceive glimpses of the same law. Every act of the Spirit has an end which it completes, for every act has had its share in making us what we are. We are linked to our past. We find it out unmistakably now and then. If that be true, do you think that the holy purposes God has inspired us with have no fulfilment somewhere and somehow within our own experience? Can you believe that they are doomed to perish except in the possible effect they may have on other men? Does God inspire men to work through the turmoil and the doubt—through the mystery and sorrow of life—and leave those high desires to fade, having no consummation in the blessed life of Heaven? No! we must believe that, though in a different way, they are fulfilled there. We must believe that the spirit is everlasting, although the outward actions may die. We must believe that Moses, though he might not himself accomplish the purpose of his life and lead the people into rest, yet found that the great hope which had burned through storm and darkness upon earth, was consummated in nobler service and in a grander scene when he joined the companies who sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

¶ When men die in the fulness of their powers, as Moses died, we think that there is a waste of power. So there might be, if the power of those who die were really extinguished. But that is not our belief. Our belief is that it is expanded, ennobled, set at once to work, that it can do its work better, that its energies are more developed, that the range and objects of its work are tenfold greater and more numerous than they are on earth. Waste! when God and His work are everywhere. Waste! when the whole universe of humanity in the other world is open to him whom we have lost on earth. Waste of power! It is a thought impossible to the Christian man as he looks upon his dead.[1]

(1) The Israelites themselves would discern, if dimly, this truth. The great truths of life and immortality must surely have begun to stir in the hearts of thoughtful men when they knew that "the Lord buried him." Shall God, then, pay such regard to the perishable frame, and neglect the nobler part which

[1] Stopford A. Brooke.

dwelt in it? The outward shape and fashioning of clay, made of the dust and returning to it, was this then Moses, and not rather the living soul, breathed into it by God, as Moses himself records? And can the Maker put so disproportionate an estimate upon His own handiwork, as carefully to store up the casket and throw away the precious jewel which it held? Could we cherish the portrait of one beloved and leave himself to perish, when we might save him by stretching out the hand? Can this be the kindness of God to His friends?—for either He must wish to preserve the souls of His servants and want the power, or He must possess the power but want the wish; and where, in the one case, would be a God worthy of reverence, or where, in the other, a God who could attract our love?

¶ When men become assured of His power, that He is the Father of spirits, and when He proves His regard for the frail and fading form, the burial of Moses might become God's way of leading reflective men out to hopeful thoughts of the spirit that had given such brightness to the now darkened face. When such questionings arose, "Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee?" (Ps. lxxxviii. 10); then a record like this might lead to the conviction, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. cxvi. 15). "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. Thou wilt shew me the path of life" (Ps. xvi. 9, 11).[1]

(2) Moses' sin was blotted out, and he knew it, although the earthly effect of it remained. But if compensation is to be complete it must include the removal of the earthly penalty. The perfect idea of God's forgiveness is that He should take away not merely the inward pain of sin but the outward stigma of it, and that He should make all life what it would have been without that sin, or still richer and higher for the very fall and rising. The spiritual Physician should not only heal the wound but obliterate the scar, and give "beauty instead of burning." In the case of Moses this does not at first appear. "The Lord buried him," but not in Canaan; and He showed him the land, but did not permit him to tread it. To an ancient Jew this must for a while have seemed strange almost to harshness,—to think that the meanest in all their tribes should enter and look on it, and eat of its plenty

[1] John Ker.

and drink of its sweet, and that he who had toiled and agonized for this lifelong end, so faithful to God and so self-sacrificing, should be excluded! No Israelite could look round on that noble home and the rejoicing family which dwelt in it without thinking of the great leader who stumbled at the door and lay buried by the threshold. Is Canaan then all, and is the whole life of Moses shut up in wanderings through a wilderness? Slowly but irresistibly the thought of another land must have risen, must have dawned upon the mind's eye—a land of which this earthly one was only the symbol, and which must have given Moses perfect compensation for all he lost in death. It could not be otherwise. They were attracted and compelled to it by all they knew of God and of His servant. It was God's very purpose in these events to educate them to a belief in another world, and to give them some faint conception of it—a world where the things and ties of earth are carried up to a heavenly temper and perfection. When a prophet came in after ages with the promise, "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off" (Isa. xxxiii. 17), it must have been felt by many to be suitable to this death of Moses, and may have had its origin in his last look, which took in "the precious things of heaven," as well as "the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof."

(3) And to Moses himself this vision would not be wholly denied. We may well imagine as the evening deepened on the mountain-top, and the land below grew dim in mist, and Moses felt God draw nearer in the twilight, that the same thoughts entered into the soul of Moses, and his regret for not entering the land passed finally away. Nothing was left but death and God. Why should he ever have regretted that? There, only wars, fresh cares, new pain, day after day, of weary battle would await him. Here, in death, there was another Canaan, the substance of the shadow he had pursued so long. In it there were green pastures and still waters, and the Shepherd of the soul.

¶ To dying men still comes the vision of the goodly land beyond the Jordan. It is not far away—only just across the river. On fair days of vision, when some strong wind parts the veils of mist and smoke that too often dominate our spiritual

atmosphere, it is clearly visible. But the vision is most often reserved for those who are waiting on the confines of the Land, ready for the signal to enter. They tell us that on that borderland they hear voices, and discern visions of beauty and splendour of which heart had not conceived. Dr. Payson said, shortly before he died, "The Celestial City is full in my view. Its glories have been upon me; its breezes fan me; its odours are wafted to me; its sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my heart."[1]

¶ On one occasion Dr. Kidd was alluding to the unwillingness which even good people sometimes had to die. "It just reminds me," he said, "of what happened when I left the auld hoose. When a' the furniture was oot, and a' the rest had gane to the new ane, I couldna leave; I paced up and doon the room in which my children were born; I gazed upon the wa's of the chamber where I studied and wrestled with God, and I couldna tear myself away. But Betty, the servant, came, and she said, "Come awa', sir, come awa'; the time's up, and the ither hoose is far better than this."[2]

III.

An Undiscovered Grave.

There is something strange and altogether singular in this, that Moses, the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets, should find a resting-place in the earth and no man be able to point it out. The sepulchres of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are known among the groves of Hebron; the bones of Joseph, after many wanderings, rest in Shechem, in that parcel of ground which his father gave to him, the best beloved son. Rachel's tomb, watered by many a tear, stands on the way to "Ephrath, which is Bethlehem"; for there her strength failed her, and she sank, as did all the ancient saints on the way to that birthplace of hope. The sepulchre of David is by Jerusalem, the home of his heart. But the last abode of Moses, the servant of God and the lawgiver of Israel, is claimed by no city in the wide land.

1. The first thing to notice is that the grave is not unknown to God. As it is in death, so is it in the grave—alone yet not alone. Moses dies alone, with no hand to clasp his, none to close

[1] F. B. Meyer. [2] J. Stark, *Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen*, 141.

his eyes; but God's finger does it. The outward form of his death is but putting into symbol and visibility the awful characteristics of that last moment for us all. However closely we have been twined with others, each of us has to unclasp all hands, and make that journey through the narrow, dark tunnel by ourselves. We even live alone in a real sense, but we each have to die as if there were not another human being in the whole universe but ourselves. But the solitude may be a solitude with God. Up there alone, with the stars and the sky and the everlasting rocks and menacing death, Moses had for companion the supporting God. That awful path is not too desolate and lonely to be trodden if we tread it with Him. Moses' lonely death leads to a society yonder. If you refer to the 32nd chapter you will find that when he was summoned to the mountain God said to him, "Die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people." He was to be buried there, up amongst the rocks of Moab, and no man was ever to visit his sepulchre to drop a tear over it. How was he "gathered unto his people"? Surely only thus, that, dying in the desert alone, he opened his eyes in the city, surrounded by "solemn troops and sweet societies" of those to whom he was kindred. So the solitude of a moment leads on to blessed and eternal companionship.

¶ As we trust God to supply the needs of the body in life, so let us trust Him for its burial in death. He marks where the dust of each of His children mingles with its mother earth. When a grave is opened, His eye rests on it; and though no foot may ever tread its soil, no hand keep it decked with flowers, He never forgets it; and none will be overlooked when the archangel blows his trumpet over land and sea.[1]

Into the silent, starless Night before us,
Naked we glide;
No hand has mapped the constellations o'er us,
No comrade at our side,
No chart, no guide.

Yet fearless toward that midnight, black and hollow,
Our footsteps fare:
The beckoning of a Father's hand we follow—
His love alone is there,
No curse, no care.[2]

[1] F. B. Meyer. [2] Edward Rowland Sill.

2. Again, no man must take from God the honour which belongs to Him alone, or stand between Him and the worship of His people. The first great lesson which the Jewish people were to be taught was the supremacy of the one true God. This was the indispensable basis of every other revelation,—the one God, alone, supreme,—and then His attributes, His law, His way to man. They were taken from among the nations, and reclaimed from idolatry to carry this truth to the world; and then, when sovereignty was established, mercy could be fully proclaimed. It was the lifelong work of Moses to fix this truth of God's sovereignty. The word given him to bear was, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." All his labours and his trials arose from the difficulty of impressing this on their deep and constant conviction, and his death would have brought him no regret had he felt assured that his work was done. How solemn and pathetic his warnings to cleave to the true God, and wander to no other, as if he felt already the misgivings of their defection. And yet what he had done for them made it not unlikely that their reverence for him might prove their snare, and that they might be tempted to give him the place he desired to secure for God. Death, which lifts every great man higher, might have raised Moses above the lesson of his life—the unapproachable supremacy of God Himself. The deification of their heroes was the manner of the nations round them; it was the atmosphere of the age; and in this event we can surely see a means taken to guard the Israelites from the temptation. Had Moses himself obtained his choice, it would have been that, in death, he might carry out the lesson of his life, and here he gains it. He dies apart, and is buried in secret, where his grave can be dishonoured by no pilgrimage, and where no false veneration can rear altars to his memory. And this first lesson did not fail. The nation worshipped many strange deities, but it never gave the place of God to His prophets. If any life could have tempted them to such a course it would have been that of Moses, and when God removes him from their sight, and leaves no relic for sense or imagination to build its worship on, there is no successor of Moses who can assume the place.

¶ How constantly the heroes of other nations have become their gods; how naturally the tomb becomes an altar, and the

shrine a temple. Never was there hero that might more readily receive the idolatrous regard of a nation than he whose memory was so immediately associated with their religion, to whom they owed their national existence, their very liberties, their lives, their hopes. How easily would the burial-place of such a saint and hero become a place of pilgrimage and an object of worship. Seven hundred years afterwards Hezekiah is distinguished as the bold reformer who broke in pieces the serpent of brass which Moses had made. "Unto those days," we are told, "the children of Israel did burn incense to it." Thus is it that for Israel's sake Moses is led up the mountain-height away into that utter loneliness; and there he dies, and God buries him, and no man knoweth the place of his sepulchre unto this day.[1]

3. In the history of the greatest and the best, the tomb is often remembered and the life forgotten. It is an easier thing to revere the dust than to follow the example. There is an admonition in the Bible, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. xiii. 7); and here, at the commencement of the lengthened roll, God inscribes it on an emphatic act. He takes away the grave of Moses that they may have before them, in full and undisturbed relief, the man himself. His words, living and dying, his walk with God till God took him, all that he was to God and to them, in self-devotion and affection, these survive him and can never die. If they came to his grave, they approached the creature and its fleeting part; but in coming to his words and his life they come to Moses himself and to God.

Men are liable to underrate the great and good in their lifetime, but after their departure they discover their goodness, and seek to compensate for their own neglect by extolling their memory. This is often true regarding men of genius. During their lives they have been misunderstood by those who cared not for their aims; but when they have passed away, the world has discovered its loss, and sought by posthumous praise to atone for its neglect. Many a gifted spirit, in uttering the truth by which he has been inspired, has met with mockery and malicious misrepresentation, but when death has stilled the restless heart of the thinker, the men who reap the results of his work attempt

[1] M. G. Pearse.

by laudation to obliterate their opposition; and many a servant of God has worn out life and hope in self-sacrificing labour, and been opposed by those he was trying to help; and it has not been until God has taken His servant home that they have discovered the true nature of his work.

¶ The sepulchre of the greater Prophet than Moses is equally unknown, and may we not wonder that Christians, under a system of spirit and life, have been more slow than Jews to learn the lesson? Once, and once only, were men invited to "see the place where the Lord lay," that they might be assured it was empty, and refrain from seeking any more the living among the dead. If research the most patient has hitherto done aught, it has been to show that the spot has left no trace upon our earth. God has made the march of armies and the desolation of centuries do for the sepulchre of Christ what His own hand did for the grave of Moses.[1]

4. The lonely death and the lost grave are signs of honour.

(1) Notice the title given to Moses: "So Moses *the servant of the Lord* died." It is a title given to him by Jehovah Himself: "My servant Moses" (Num. xii. 7). What an honourable title it is! And Moses was this of choice, for he willed to be the servant of God, rather than to be great in the land of the Pharaohs. Such he was most perseveringly throughout the whole of his life. Such he was most intensely; for he waited upon God for his directions, as a servant waits upon his master; and he endeavoured to do all things according to the pattern which was shown him in the holy mount. Though he was king in Jeshurun, he never acted on his own authority, but was the lowly instrument of the Divine will. Moses was faithful to God in all his house, as a servant. You neither see him overstepping his office nor neglecting it. His reverence for the Lord's name was deep, his devotion to the Lord's cause was complete, and his confidence in the Lord's word was constant. He was a true servant of God from the time when he was appointed at the burning bush until the hour when he surrendered his keys of office to his successor, and climbed the appointed mount to die.

¶ As Abraham received in Scripture, as his special designation, the title of "the Friend of God" (2 Chron. xx. 7; Isa. xli. 8; Jas.

[1] John Ker.

ii. 23), so Moses bears the title of "the Servant of the Lord" (Ex. xiv. 31; Num. xii. 7; Deut. xxxiv. 5; Josh. i. 1; Heb. iii. 5). The special quality which this epithet marks is his unswerving faithfulness—that absolutely unshaken fidelity to God which characterized him throughout his entire career, alike at Heliopolis, where he worshipped God daily outside the walls of the city, turning towards the sun-rising; in Midian, where he proclaimed by the name of his son that God was "his help" (Ex. xviii. 4); in his dealings with Pharaoh, wherein from first to last he followed exactly all the directions that God gave him; and in his leadership of the people, which was little less than a constant pleading to them of God's claims, God's will to bless, God's power to punish. Moses was "faithful" to God "*in all his house*" (Heb. iii. 5); *i.e.* in the entire government and administration which he exercised for forty years over Israel, God's "house" or "household." He was ever witnessing to them for God. "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. xiv. 13); "the Lord shall fight for you" (Ex. xiv. 14); "at even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out" (Ex. xvi. 6).[1]

(2) The people of Israel must be taught, in the beginning of their history, that the messengers of truth do not come from their midst, but from a Master above. Man's philosophy is the offspring of the soil of this earth. It appeals to man's reason and finds there its reward. But God's law descends from God's throne, and while it meets the requirements of man's nature, it is not responsible to them. Every true bearer of it has his errand from God, gives his account to Him, and finds his reward in God at last.

How faithfully to men, and also how kindly, would all our work be done, if we had our account not to them, but to God, ever in our eye! Moses ascends the mount to learn God's will, and, when he has finished his work, he goes to Him to die, and to find from Him his sepulchre. He, whose servant he is, takes him back into His keeping, in the spirit of that grand old psalm which comes down to us as "A prayer of Moses, the man of God" (Ps. xc.); "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

(3) There is another point in connexion with his death that expresses the kindness of the Lord. We know we must die, and, knowing this, we have the wish to die among our own; to be

[1] G. Rawlinson, *Moses*, 200.

tended in our last moments by our dearest ones on earth; and when all is over (is it not also true of most people?) to be laid beside our kindred.

> As if the quiet bones were blest
> Among familiar names to rest.

And whilst this is true, it is also true that, should any of our household be "sick unto death," our desire is that they should die at home. If we should hear of our absent child being dangerously ill, our first thought would be to get him home; and if he were too ill to be removed, we would then arrange to go to him, and nurse him wherever he might be, until death relieved us of our sad but loved charge. So Moses was well cared for in his death; for God, like a comforting mother, took him into His own care, and laid him down to rest. He loved him, and so brought him up into one of His upper chambers, where, tended by Himself, the good man remained until he died, and then the Friend, who had been with him in his dying, laid his body in its unknown grave. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

¶ I heard a daughter say, not long since, speaking of her mother's long and fatal illness, "I am so thankful I was able to nurse her, and do everything for her with my own hands all the way through to the end." And when she spoke the words it was quite evident that the facts she stated gave her the deepest satisfaction and joy.[1]

¶ What a marvellous coming forth of the Lord God out of the thick darkness is here! Moses must die; but no human friend may wait upon that hallowed death-bed, no human eye may watch the ebbing of that preternatural strength, no human hands may lay that flesh, which had shone with the reflection of the uncreated glory, in the dust. God will be all in all to His servant; about him to protect him, above him to draw him upwards, beside him to uphold, beneath him to sustain. Comfort and help in the dark hour must come to Moses direct from God. The utterances which hang around that solitary departure are the Divine words, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."[2]

¶ Is not this the manner in which all saints die? Their death is precious to the Lord, and after the troubled day of life—agitated in its early morning by the trumpet calling to battle; fretted through an overcast noon by the pressure of its responsibilities

[1] A. Scott. [2] Bishop Woodford.

and cares; lit in the evening by the rays of a stormy sunset, piercing through the cloud-drift, the tired spirit sinks down upon the couch, which the hands of God had spread, and He bends over it to give it its good-night kiss, as in earliest days the mother had done to the wearied child. That embrace, however, is the threshold, not of a long night of insensibility, but of an awakening in the supernal light of the everlasting morning.[1]

When all my lessons have been learned,
And the last year at school is done,
I shall put up my books and games:
"Good-bye, my fellows, every one!"

The dusty road will not seem long,
Nor twilight lonely, nor forlorn
The everlasting whip-poor-wills
That lead me back where I was born.

And there beside the open door,
In a large country dim and cool,
Her waiting smile shall hear at last,
"Mother, I am come home from school."

[1] F. B. Meyer.

The Excellence of Things Ordinary.

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THE EXCELLENCE OF THINGS ORDINARY.

And the manna ceased on the morrow, after they had eaten of the old corn of the land.—Josh. v. 12.

1. THE giving of the manna to the Israelites was one of the most notable providences of the Exodus. It happened when the pilgrims had struck inland, and were faced with the starvation of the desert. The desert was probably more fertile then than it is now, but even then it was utterly inadequate to provide for that mighty and marching company. Faced by certain starvation, as they thought, we can hardly wonder that Israel began to murmur. "Would to God," they cried, "we had been left to die in Egypt, where at least we had food to satisfy our hunger." And it was then, in the hour of their extremity, when faced by the gaunt spectre of starvation, that God wrought the miracle of manna. From that day onward it had never failed, in spite of all murmuring and all rebellion. If the gifts of God depended on man's faith, the manna would have vanished very quickly. But day after day, through fret and sin and cowardice, God held to His purpose, as He always does; for the long-suffering of God is our salvation.

2. But now the forty years' journeying was over. The need was gone, and so the manna ceased. Israel awoke one morning, and the ground was no longer white; it was all golden with the ripened corn. We can picture the look of wild astonishment which would flash in an instant into a thousand eyes on that morning of the ceasing of the manna. There was deep doctrine in the giving of the manna. There was doctrine not less deep in its withdrawal. God had His lessons to teach Israel then, and through Israel to teach us all.

¶ Various conjectures have been formed regarding the nature of the manna, which every morning whitened like hoar-frost the

ground around the encampment of the Israelites in the wilderness. It was indeed a miraculous substance in the sense of its having been provided at the very time when, and in the very circumstances where, it was required. We can see most conspicuously God's hand put forth from behind the veil of His ordinary providence, in the abundance and unfailing regularity of the supply, and in the exceptional feature of its corruption if kept over an ordinary day, and its preservation when reserved for the Sabbath. But we have no reason to believe that it was in itself a miraculous substance, a material previously unknown, created specially for the purpose and coming down straight from heaven. God economises the supernatural element in His working, and makes use of ordinary means as far as they will go. He did not create abnormal loaves and fishes in the miracle at Capernaum; He only increased the fisherman's scanty meal into a feast for thousands; and the extended loaves and fishes were in all respects the same as those which formed the starting-point of the miracle. He who used the ordinary thorny growth of the desert as the medium of His transcendent revelation when He appeared in the burning bush, and converted the simple shepherd's rod in the hand of Moses into a serpent, and made it the instrument of compassing the deliverance of Israel by signs and wonders, would in all likelihood employ on this occasion a substance indigenous to the desert, as the basis of the great miracle which He wrought for the supply of the daily bread of His people. Such a substance might well have been the white hard exudation that drops from the thorns of the tamarisk shrub, and frequently covers the ground to a considerable extent, which is used for food at the present day by the Arabs, and to which they give the name of manna. We cannot expect to trace an exact correspondence, for some of the qualities and conditions of the manna of Scripture were unmistakably supernatural. It is sufficient if the natural object could serve as a mere fulcrum for the miracle.[1]

I.

God's Provision is always suitable to our Circumstances.

The manna was the best possible preparation to answer the nomadic life of the wilderness, where there was no land to sow or reap; but when the land of promise was reached, where there was plenty of ground, and that needing to be tilled, to send down

[1] Hugh Macmillan.

manna from heaven would surely lead to a life of sloth and excess. Therefore, the old corn of the land was better than the manna in such a country; and when the manna ceased, it was because God had better provisions to meet the new circumstances of His people.

Whatever might have been the nature and origin of the mysterious substance which God made use of, it is evident that the manna was intended to serve a wise and gracious purpose in the religious economy of the Israelites. They had followed Moses into the wilderness beyond the reach of ordinary food; where, owing to the nature of the soil and climate, they could neither sow nor reap, and where there was no native provision for their wants. They were in the wilderness, in obedience to God's command, to be trained and disciplined under His own immediate eye, and amid simple and severe conditions favourable for the checking of all that was evil in them, and fostering all that was good, in order that they might be fit to occupy the Holy Land, and to become God's holy priesthood for the blessing of all the families of the earth. God therefore engaged to give them what they could not provide for themselves. He who said that if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness all other things that we truly need will be given to us, furnished a remarkable illustration of the truth of the promise in the experience of the Israelites.

But this supernatural life was not to last for ever. It was appropriate to the wilderness, God's special dwelling-place, as it were, where there was nothing but God and nature; but it was not suitable to the Promised Land, in which all the conditions of a natural human life existed, and which was the haunt of man as well as the scene of nature's most beneficent operations. It was necessary when in the desert, where man could not sow, or reap, or procure support by his own efforts, that he should be fed with manna from heaven; but in a region of agriculture, where man's ordinary labour sufficed to supply his ordinary wants, the manna would be altogether superfluous.

(1) *God gives help where help is needed.*—He gave manna when the Israelites could not provide their own food, and continued it only until they were able to supply themselves. Thus was it with our Saviour's miracles of healing. He removed the dis-

abilities which prevented the sufferers from earning their own bread and helping themselves in the struggle of life. Those who were lagging behind their fellows in the race because of physical weakness and incapacity He brought to the front, and restored to them in full vigour the power which would enable them henceforth to hold their own. And there His aid stopped.

(2) But *God encumbers no one with help.*—When our Lord was on earth He gave the subjects of His miraculous cures the power to help themselves. And as in natural, so does God act in spiritual, things. He helps us to help ourselves. We must work out our own salvation, for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. No one can truly know what it is to find his sufficiency in God but he who puts forth all the strength which he himself possesses. It is exactly in proportion as we strive to do all, and strive in vain, that we can have an experimental consciousness of God's almighty aid. And thus the believer feels that God's strength is made perfect in his own weakness.

¶ I have my hands full, preparing to build our new boat. I have to cut the timber some twenty miles distant and have it carried here. You will probably be disgusted at hearing that I am busy just now making bricks to build a house in which to construct the vessel. Within the last fortnight we have made some ten thousand. That is doubtless poor work to be occupied with in the Mission field, but it must be done; and in even such humble occupation I hope the good Lord will not withhold His blessing. Mission boats unfortunately do not *grow* of themselves,—they have to be built, every inch of them. But trees have been growing for ages, of the Lord's planting; and as we fell them I like to think that He ordained them for this purpose.[1]

(3) And yet *self-help is never independent of God's help.*—The Israelites looked forward from the wilderness to the Promised Land as the place of consummation and rest. All conflict, hardship, and toil would there be over for ever; all hopes and desires would be fulfilled; and life would be one long holiday of ease and enjoyment in a land flowing with milk and honey. But they found that their former discipline in the new circumstances was not ended, but only changed in its character; that

[1] *Mackay of Uganda*, 385.

amid golden cornfields and rich pastures and luxuriant vineyards they would have to practise in even higher degree the virtues which the wilderness life called forth. The tenure of the Holy Land was a moral one, and only on stern moral conditions could it be owned. They had to enter it as armed soldiers, and to conquer every inch of it; and they had to hold it by a repetition of the same toils and self-denials by which they had won it. And how symbolical was the new corn of the land—the bread for which they toiled in the sweat of their face—of this life of self-conquest and devotion which it sustained! It might seem that their life in the wilderness, directly supported by God and under His immediate care, was higher and more heavenly than their life in Canaan—sowing and reaping their fields, and providing for their wants by their own labour. But it was not so; for the wilderness-life fed by the manna of heaven was only an introduction to, and a preparation for, the higher life of Canaan fed by the corn of earth, which was none the less the gift of God that they had to toil for it.

¶ In George Eliot's *Stradivarius* there occur the following suggestive lines:—

> *Stradivari speaks.* The masters only know whose work is good:
> They will choose mine, and while God gives them skill
> I give them instruments to play upon,
> God choosing me to help Him.
> *Naldo.* What! were God
> At fault for violins, thou absent?
> *Stradivari.* Yes;
> He were at fault for Stradivari's work.

That is one view of the work of life in its relation to God—He *needing us*, demanding that we become "workers together with him." Another view—the complementary one—is that which recognizes *our need of Him.* And, while both are undoubtedly acknowledged by Browning, it is the latter on which I think he lays the greater emphasis; as, for example, in the closing lines of "Rabbi Ben Ezra"—

> So, take and use Thy work:
> Amend what flaws may lurk,
> What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!

My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same![1]

II.

God's Method of Provision is from the Supernatural to the Natural.

1. The incident of the manna of the wilderness giving place to the corn of Canaan is in entire harmony with all God's dealings with man. The dispensation that was inaugurated by supernatural manifestations is carried on by common helps, and through the homely experiences of human life. The signs and wonders which opened a new era, or were needed to produce faith in great emergencies, are not perpetuated in ordinary circumstances. The creation commenced with a stupendous miracle, but is preserved by the quiet and uniform methods of nature. The Law of Moses, which was given amid the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, was put in force throughout the continuous history of Israel by its own solemn sanctions. The Christianity which first took its place in history by the aid of astonishing miracles appealing to the senses, now maintains its position by its own unobtrusive spiritual power. The gifts of Divine inspiration, which were shown objectively to men in the tongues of flame and the mighty rushing wind of Pentecost, were discontinued when the work of the Holy Ghost was carried on spiritually in all places and in all hearts.

The ceasing of the manna gave to Israel new views of the presence and providence of God. It taught them to see God in common things, and to realise His presence in the fields. The manna was not wholly natural; it was a miracle. It was a striking and supernatural provision. It came from heaven—it was the bread of angels; it was not an ordinary part of the economy of nature. And so when the children of Israel thought of providence, and when they meditated on the care of God, that care for them would always be associated with wonderful and strange interpositions. But the day came when

[1] J. Flew, *Studies in Browning*, 198.

the manna ceased to fall; the providence of God was shifted elsewhere. It was transferred from the miracle of manna to the corn that ripened in a thousand fields. And we see what that achieved for Israel, and how it taught them larger views of providence, for the God of the manna and the God of miracle had become the God who ripens every harvest. No longer in an isolated miracle did Israel find the hand of the Divine. The manna ceased; they were cast back on nature to find in nature the same care of God. And so they learned—what is so hard to learn—that providence had a wider reach than once they dreamed, and that the common field may be as full of heaven as the manna which is the bread of angels.

¶ God gives at appropriate times meat to eat which the world knoweth not of—hidden manna, living bread direct from heaven. And when the manna is withdrawn and we are supplied with corn—with human nature's daily food—let us seek to profit by what the manna has done for us and taught us. We have received spiritual food that we may have grace and strength to carry on the common duties of life. We have tasted on the Holy Mount that the Lord is gracious, that we may follow hard after Him along the beaten paths of life. The life imparted by Divine power must be sustained by human means. The extraordinary, appropriate to times of religious excitement, must pass into the ordinary experience. What is the birth of a remarkable occasion must become the habit of an ordinary life.

2. It seems a backward step as we read the story; and perhaps we, who no longer have anything like the miraculous intervention and manifestations of Divine power, may look back with a lingering and longing desire that our life had been cast in the days when the more visible and tangible tokens of the Divine glory were manifested in the world. We envy those who lived in the days when manna fell from heaven and the water came forth from the smitten rock, when the Jordan was cleft in twain, and men, without striking a blow, felt that the Divine arm was outstretched on their behalf. They had the miracles; we have the commonplace. They were privileged to behold the extraordinary manifestations of God; we live in a world where there seems scarcely any manifestation of Him at all. But so far from this transition from the extraordinary

to the ordinary being a step downwards in the education of human beings, it is distinctly a step upwards. If we will contemplate life from three great standpoints we will see that that is true. Our life is real and strong in proportion as it is filled with a clear conception of God, in proportion as it is full of spiritual vigour within, and in proportion as it is energetic towards those whom we meet abroad. In those three relationships life finds its perfection.

O, where is He that trod the sea,
  O, where is He that spake,—
And demons from their victims flee,
  The dead their slumbers break;
The palsied rise in freedom strong,
  The dumb men talk and sing,
And from blind eyes, benighted long,
  Bright beams of morning spring.

O, where is He that trod the sea,
  O, where is He that spake,—
And piercing words of liberty
  The deaf ears open shake;
And mildest words arrest the haste
  Of fever's deadly fire,
And strong ones heal the weak who waste
  Their life in sad desire.

O, where is He that trod the sea,
  O, where is He that spake,—
And dark waves, rolling heavily,
  A glassy smoothness take;
And lepers, whose own flesh has been
  A solitary grave,
See with amaze that they are clean,
  And cry, "'Tis He can save!"

O, where is He that trod the sea,—
  'Tis only He can save;
To thousands hungering wearily
  A wondrous meal He gave:
Full soon, celestially fed,
  Their rustic fare they take;
'Twas springtide when He blest the bread
  And harvest when He brake.

O, where is He that trod the sea,—
My soul! the Lord is here:
Let all thy fears be hushed in thee;
To leap, to look, to hear,
Be thine: thy needs He'll satisfy:
Art thou diseased, or dumb?
Or dost thou in thy hunger cry?
"I come," saith Christ; "I come."[1]

(1) The transition from the extraordinary to the ordinary is *a step upwards in our conception of God.*—The thought which underlies our regret when we say that we wish we had lived in the days of more marked interposition and manifestation of God is this—that, somehow or other, wherever there is a marvellous or miraculous manifestation of God there is an opportunity of knowing Him which is denied to us in this marvellous and marked fashion. We want to be back in the old day of miracle, and we want the Divine made known to us through His marvels. What is that but saying, "O Lord, Thou hast made the world, and Thou hast made the world according to order, and laws govern that world. Break Thy laws that we may know Thee! Interpose and break up the ordinances of Thine own creation in order that we may understand Thee." But surely that is to demand almost an impossibility! It is an admission that we have but little conception of the Divine working at all. Or, to put it in another way, suppose that God were to yield to our prayer and that we were to have these constant manifestations of Him, that we should still have the manna falling about our habitations, that we should have every Jordan that interposed an obstacle between us and our desire cleft asunder by miraculous force. What then? We can see immediately what would be the result. That which happens constantly ceases to be extraordinary from the nature of the case; and there would be no more reason for believing in God because of such frequent manifestations of a startling character, for they would no longer be of the very character which we plead is their essential power, they no longer would have any startling features, but would become the commonplace of life. And what then would be our inheritance in God? We should have an occasional God, not a permanent one; and

[1] T. T. Lynch, *The Rivulet*, 42.

there would be substituted for the God that is about our path and about our bed, the God who only occasionally comes down to manifest Himself in our life.

¶ We are enlarging our thoughts when we lay aside the demand for the miraculous and the marvellous—we enlarge our thoughts of God when we say, "God is not only in the startling things, but also in the commonplace things of life; God is not only in the cleft rock, He is also in the quiet hill and in the soft meadow; He is not only in the cloven sea or the Jordan struck asunder, but also in the little burn that babbles at our feet; He is not only in the sweep of an archangel descending into our midst, He is in the face of the little child that climbs upon our knees for kisses; He is not only in the fire which falls down from heaven, He is also in the faces of the sick and the weary, and the needy that demand our assistance."[1]

¶ This commonplace world of ours was the beautiful world of Christ. The world in which we are now living was the one in which He lived and worked on through the days of His appointed time. The duties laid upon our hearts are like to those that were measured out to Him.

> And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought.

The example set before us for our emulation is that of One who did the humblest of these duties with the same faithfulness and love of service as characterized Him in His higher service as the Word of God and the Saviour of mankind.[2]

> O Power, more near my life than life itself
> (Or what seems life to us in sense immured),
> Even as the roots, shut in the darksome earth,
> Share in the tree-top's joyance, and conceive
> Of sunshine and wide air and wingèd things
> By sympathy of nature, so do I
> Have evidence of Thee so far above,
> Yet in and of me! Rather Thou the root
> Invisibly sustaining, hid in light,
> Not darkness, or in darkness made by us.
> If sometimes I must hear good men debate
> Of other witness of Thyself than Thou,

[1] W. Boyd Carpenter.

[2] J. B. Maclean, *The Secret of the Stream*, 48.

As if there needed any help of ours
To nurse Thy flickering life, that else must cease,
Blown out, as 'twere a candle, by men's breath,
My soul shall not be taken in their snare,
To change her inward surety for their doubt
Muffled from sight in formal robes of proof:
While she can only feel herself through Thee,
I fear not Thy withdrawal; more I fear,
Seeing, to know Thee not, hoodwinked with dreams
Of signs and wonders, while, unnoticed, Thou,
Walking Thy garden still, commun'st with men,
Missed in the commonplace of miracle.[1]

(2) It is *a step upwards in our moral education.*—Life is not merely made up of the conceptions which we have of God; these conceptions must issue in our own personal growth. The object which God has in putting us into this little world for the threescore years and ten is not to secure our happiness or to startle us into a kind of hysterical perception of His presence, but to educate us as His children, to bring us after that sort and after that measure that we may enter into His conception of things, that we may be sharers of His character, partakers of His nature, and that we may look at life from His own standpoint. Therefore, when we ask that God should make Himself manifest by these miracles and wonders, we are really making a false conception of our own powers and capabilities in relation to God.

For by what faculty do we perceive God? Do we expect to apprehend Him by the physical eye? Do we imagine that we shall apprehend Him by intellectual effort? Surely those are only conceptions which belong to past ideas, crude notions of God. We cannot perceive God by the physical eye! God is a spirit! We cannot perceive God by our intellectual powers, because the world by wisdom knew not God, and if He be God at all to us He is the Incomprehensible One. Then, of course, the miracle and the wonder are outside the case, for the marvellous can only speak on the plane of things physical or appeal to the power of the mind, the intellectual power within us. Those are not the ways by which we apprehend God; and to imagine that a man would be made to believe in God by a miracle who had no capacity at work that could apprehend God otherwise, is a contradiction in terms.

[1] James Russell Lowell.

Our Lord was constantly teaching that. In His parable of Dives and Lazarus He uses the very principle. Here the man in his torment imagines that a wonder will convince his brethren. "Send Lazarus! Let the marvel appear! Let the miracles be sent! Send Lazarus!" And the only answer is, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead"—in other words, if they have not the moral capacity to follow the teachings of Moses and the prophets, if they have no moral affinity and sympathy with the prophet's teaching, no wonder will give them that capacity.

¶ The power which understands and apprehends God is not the physical, not the intellectual, but the moral power within us. The way in which we can understand God is by the exercise of our moral faculties. Jesus Christ was the greatest moral teacher that ever lived, and what is Jesus Christ's emphatic statement concerning this? He says there are two faculties, two powers by which God can be apprehended, two ways in which we shall be able to ascertain and lay our hand upon our Father in heaven; one is single-mindedness, the other purity of heart.[1]

The one condition by which we can understand anything or anybody is that we shall be in some degree a sharer of their nature. We talk of knowing God. How can we know Him if we be not righteous? How can we understand Him if we be not holy? How can we enter into His love if no love dwells within our soul? It is the possession of moral faculties that brings power; these make up the fingers of the hand by which alone we can grasp the hand of God, by which He can become a reality to us, entering into our soul and life. Hence, when the message comes to us, "Go forward! Rest no longer upon the miracle! Rest now upon the ordinary manifestations!" it is as if they said, "I make an appeal now to your responsibility; I want responsiveness on your part." "You must give moral co-operation"—that is the meaning of the message.

¶ Place the tourist who hurries across the Atlantic and through the towns of Europe in order to see or "to do" the Continent—place him with his erratic mind untrained before the greatest masterpieces of art; plant him in the chapel at Florence; let him stand face to face with Michael Angelo's creations of Night and Morning. His first impression will be, "These are greatly

[1] W. Boyd Carpenter.

overpraised; why, the very anatomy is faulty; I cannot see why people should praise these things." But now for a moment imagine that there drops upon that man's soul as he stands there some little portion of Michael Angelo's nature. What a transformation takes place within his soul in his power of perception at that moment! Then he sees something new; then these "greatly overpraised" figures begin to have a message for him; they seem to speak into his life now because Michael Angelo is in his soul, and he can read what Michael Angelo meant.[1]

¶ I am truly glad you like Humboldt's letters so much. How necessary for appreciation of a book, scene, picture, society, is a certain previous adaptation of the frame of mind! Do you remember how little you cared for that book the first time of reading it in a smaller form? Experience, added light, and the aspect given by events which no purpose or control could have arranged, have given it now fresh meaning and made it a new book.[2]

¶ This was one of the first lessons that young Henry Drummond learned from John Ruskin. Before the master came to open his eyes, a ploughed field to Henry Drummond was just a ploughed field—a sight unlovely, unattractive. To Ruskin, however, it was a wonderful study in colour; and so it became to Drummond. At the touch of the master's hand the commonplace field was transformed before his eyes. And to his ever-deepening vision it became more and more a thing of beauty and a source of joy.[3]

(3) It is *a step upwards in our co-operation with God.*—This is the third aspect of life. Our life is a life of association and society with others, and so long as men were in the state in which they were surrounded by the marvellous and miraculous, the manna fell round about their habitation, and the difference between their condition after they entered into the Promised Land and their condition before, was this, that that manna fell without their effort, it fell just where they could gather it without any exertion, but the corn needed to be sown, and the corn needed to be gathered in the spot where it grew, and therefore the children of Israel were now in the position of being made co-operators in the work of God. Hitherto they had been babes fed just according to the discretion

[1] W. Boyd Carpenter.
[2] F. W. Robertson, *Life and Letters*, 449.
[3] J. B. Maclean, *The Secret of the Stream*, 42.

of the parent, now they are the participators in the work, they have passed the stage in which everything is being done for them into the stage in which they are to be morally responsible and co-operative, in which they are to co-operate with God in His great order and His great work.

The sinner's own fault? So it was.
If every own fault found us out,
Dogged us and hedged us round about,
What comfort should we take because
Not half our due we thus wrung out?

Clearly his own fault. Yet I think
My fault in part, who did not pray
But lagged and would not lead the way.
I, haply, proved his missing link.
God help us both to mend and pray.[1]

Co-operation with God is the great step which we make when we reach the conception of Christianity. Christ went up on high but to bestow gifts on men, and that we might be fellow-workers together with God. The stage which we are regretting is the stage of advance; it is the stage where we are brought alongside the great Worker of all good, who works ceaselessly; alongside the Spirit, which works in the hearts of men. And therefore we attain a nobler position. Although we say we no longer live when miracles are wrought, and the Son of God has entered into the heavens, and is an invisible Divine Being to us, the answer comes back, "Yes, but He has left you a heritage of co-operation with Him, He has brought you into the position in which the full corn of the land is to be your food, and not only your food, but is to be gathered by you that it may be the food of other men." That is a far nobler position.

God is not dumb, that He should speak no more;
If thou hast wanderings in the wilderness
And find'st not Sinai, 'tis thy soul is poor;
There towers the mountain of the voice no less,
Which whoso seeks shall find, but he who bends,
Intent on manna still and mortal ends,
Sees it not, neither hears its thundered lore.

[1] C. G. Rossetti.

Slowly the Bible of the race is writ.
And not on paper leaves nor leaves of stone:
Each age, each kindred, adds a verse to it,
Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan.
While swings the sea, while mists the mountains shroud,
While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of cloud,
Still at the prophets' feet the nations sit.[1]

¶ As we advance in Christian experience, we think less of the coming down from heaven in the incarnation, and more of the going back in the ascension. The Babe Jesus is less to us than the ascended Christ. We look, not so much towards the cradle of the manger-bed, as upward to the throne and forward to the second advent. It makes a great difference to us whether we occupy the standpoint of the birth or of the ascension; and many a system of theology, when weighed in the balance, is found wanting, because it fails to understand that the manna ceases when the Jordan is crossed and Canaan entered.[2]

How to labour and find it sweet:
How to get the good red gold
That veinèd hides in the granite fold
Under our feet—
The good red gold that is bought and sold,
Raiment to man, and house, and meat!

And how, while delving, to lift the eye
To the far-off mountains of amethyst,
The rounded hills, and the intertwist
Of waters that lie
Calm in the valleys, or that white mist
Sailing across a soundless sky.[3]

III.

There are Other, if Minor, Lessons to be learned from this Incident.

1. The ceasing of the manna should teach us that there is inevitable loss in all our gains. It was a great thing for Israel to gain the plains of Jericho, but, when they had done so, they lost

[1] James Russell Lowell. [2] F. B. Meyer.
[3] James Herbert Morse.

the bread of angels. For forty years they had been struggling forward to win the land of their hopes and of their dreams. Now it was theirs—they stood upon its soil; all they had battled and toiled for had been crowned. But now that it was theirs the manna ceased; the miracle of every morning was no more; and dimly this stubborn people would perceive that something is lost with everything gained.

At every step we take, something must go—something, perhaps, which we reckoned precious yesterday. And he alone is wise and brave and cheerful who recognizes that inevitable law, and presses forward undaunted to the best, with the courage to forget what is behind. We gain the promised land, and lose the manna. We gain experience, and lose the morning dew. We gain the strength and energy of manhood, and lose the freshness and wonder of the child. We gain the peace and the beauty of old age, and lose the strength and energy of manhood.

Now these are facts, and a wise man faces facts. He does not murmur or cry for the impossible. He sets his face steadfastly towards Jerusalem and turns his back upon his boyhood's Galilee. For he knows that though the manna be withdrawn there will still be the ingathering of the autumn, and he lifts up his eyes, and the fields are white to harvest, "some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundredfold."

Farewell! since never more for thee
The sun comes up our eastern skies,
Less bright henceforth shall sunshine be
To some fond heart, and saddened eyes.

There are who for thy last long sleep
Shall sleep as sweetly never more,
Shall weep because thou can'st not weep,
And grieve that all thy griefs are o'er.

Sad thrift of love! the loving breast,
On which the aching head was thrown,
Gave up the weary head to rest,
But kept the aching for its own.

2. The ceasing of the manna teaches us to be cautious in asserting that anything is indispensable. If there was one thing graven upon the heart of Israel it was that without the manna

they could not live at all. Remember that of those who had left Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua now survived. All the others had been born out in the wilderness, and were children of desert air and desert nurture. The first thing that had caught their eye had been the manna. The first food they had tasted had been manna. As children, as boys, as men in the prime of manhood, it was manna that had stood between them and death; until at last, after these years of nurture, of daily and unvarying dependence, there was not a man in Israel but would think that manna was indispensable to him. Then in the plain of Jericho the manna ceased. The morning dawned when the manna was not there. For the first time in nine-and-thirty years the ground was not white with sustenance from heaven. And did they perish then, or did God let them starve?

¶ There is no worse service that any man can render than calling that indispensable which is not really so. Some things *are* vital to life and salvation, and to these we must hold in the teeth of all defiance; but apart from these let us be cautious in saying that this or that is indispensable. We have all been fed on certain views of the truth, just as the Israelites were fed on manna. We have looked at the Bible in a certain way since we were children at our mother's knee. And so wedded were we to that precious nurture, and to the tender memories with which it is inwoven, that to some of us it seemed that we must starve if we were bereft of the manna of our youth. Then came the morning when the manna ceased. Our intellect awoke and it was gone. New truths arrested us—new thoughts of revelation—fresh insight into the ways of God in nature; and the strange thing is that *then* we did not starve, but were fed upon the finest of the wheat. Christ became real to us, His love became more wonderful; the purposes of God became more magnificent. The manna of our unthinking childhood ceased only to lead us to the harvest field. And so we have learned in the conflict of to-day, when the faith of Jesus is fighting for its life, to be very cautious lest we harm the cause by saying that this or that is indispensable. The one thing vital is that Jesus came, and lived, and died as a sacrifice, and rose. Fix the one point of the compass fast in that, and let the other swing as widely as you please.[1]

3. There is one other lesson to link with the ceasing of the manna. It is that God, as we advance in life, brings us back to

[1] G. H. Morrison.

the food of long ago. Had there been any manna down in Egypt? Had manna been Israel's food before the Exodus? There were few now who could recall these days; yet corn, not manna, had been the food of Egypt. And now the wanderers come back to corn, to the old nurture of the storied past, yet all so radiant now with love and mercy that the old has become new for evermore. That was the path by which God led His people. He brought them back to the old, and it was new. That is the path by which God leads us all, if we are in earnest to know and do His will. We toil and we suffer and we play our part, and we feast on dew-touched manna for a season; but the truths that we need to live by and to die by are the commonplaces of long ago. We have all had our manna days, and we thank God for them, they were so full of wonder and delight. But life is stern, and sin is very terrible, and the manna has ceased and we are back to corn—back to our fathers' need of a Redeemer, back to the feet of an all-sufficient Christ.

There is a childhood into which we grow,
  A heart-simplicity whereby we hold
  Love's sunshine fairer than the glint of gold,
As that we hope for passeth that we know:
Warm memories from the tender long ago
  Whisper their tale, and we can ne'er grow old
  If now and then life's shadows grey and cold
Are flooded with our childhood's after-glow.
We are not old till we forget the way
  That leads us from the tumult of the street
  To Memory's dimly-lighted, still retreat,
Where Youth comes back to those who have grown grey,
Where all may find a benison, save they
  Whom long forgetfulness hath made unmeet.[1]

[1] P. C. Ainsworth, *Poems and Sonnets*, 63.

The Choice of a Master.

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The Choice of a Master.

Choose you this day whom ye will serve.—Josh. xxiv. 15.

1. This was the farewell charge of the veteran chieftain Joshua to the tribes of Israel gathered together at Shechem. He had watched the childhood of the nation. He had seen a band of fugitives organized into an army, disciplined by adversity, entering at last as a victorious nation on the promised possession. He had watched their religious history, the triumph of the great truth of the One God which they were to hold as a sacred deposit, and hand down to after ages. It was their greatness that to them were committed "the oracles of God." Yet he had seen them already false to their high mission. He had noted the reappearance of polytheistic ideas, he had seen the return to the Apis-worship of Egypt, he had mourned over the importation of more than one foreign cult. He knew that he was the leader of a chosen people, but of a people chosen not for their own greatness, but for a special duty or vocation in God's world. And he saw that they had not realized their vocation. In the new phase of their history on which they were entering, everything now turned upon a choice. They were at a solemn crisis. God had chosen them for His work; but God's choice is never absolute, never a mere selection for pre-eminence, never a mere display of power, but part of a great purpose which runs through time. To fail to do that work to which God calls is, by that failure, to nullify the choice. It was, then, a matter of life and death for Israel. How would they decide?

2. The place in which that question was asked and answered was full of memories. It was there, tradition said, that the first promise had been made to Abraham: "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. xii. 7). It was there, in the valley between Ebal

and Gerizim, the mount of cursing and the mount of blessing, that, in obedience to the word of Moses, the Law had been rehearsed. It was there that the embalmed body of Joseph, which they had brought up from Egypt, was to find its final resting-place.

It was fitting that this cradle of the nation should witness their vow, as it witnessed the fulfilment of God's promise. What Plymouth Rock is to one side of the Atlantic, or Hastings Field to the other, Shechem was to Israel. Vows sworn there had a sanctity added by the place. Nor did these remembrances exhaust the appropriateness of the site. The oak, which had waved green above Abram's altar, had looked down on another significant incident in the life of Jacob, when, in preparation for his long journey to Bethel, he had made a clean sweep of the idols of his household, and buried them "under the oak which was by Shechem" (Gen. xxxv. 2–4). His very words are quoted by Joshua in his command, in verse 23, and it is impossible to overlook the intention to parallel the two events. The spot which had seen the earlier act of purification from idolatry was for that very reason chosen for the later. It is possible that the same tree at whose roots the idols from beyond the river, which Leah and Rachel had brought, had been buried, was that under which Joshua had set up his memorial stone; and it is possible that the very stone had been part of Abram's altar. But, in any case, the place was sacred by these past manifestations of God and devotions of the fathers, so that we need not wonder that Joshua selected it rather than Shiloh, where the ark was, for the scene of the national oath of obedience.

3. Such were the associations which gathered around them as the multitudes in the valley of decision listened to the words of their great leader; and the charge was a retrospect and a prospect, a review of God's unchanging goodness, and an anxious looking forward to the future. Would the people be true to their mission? God had given them a land for which they did not labour; He had driven the nations out before them. But for what? "That they might keep his statutes, and observe his laws," that they might be the repositories of the great truth which was to prepare the world for its regeneration, the truth of monotheism which should prepare for Christianity. Would

they be true to their vocation? Had they really apprehended that for which they had been apprehended? Would they choose that for which God had chosen them? If not, still they must choose. "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve." Shall it be the polytheism from which Abraham had been called, or the polytheism of the Amorites among whom they were now dwelling? They might choose their vocation to be the servants of the One True God, or they might choose among the many idolatries in which they might miss their vocation. But choose they must.

¶ It is the critical position to which the prophet Elijah also brought the people. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" How long will you spend your life in inconclusive flirtations? Settle the matter. Make up your minds. "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word"; and the timid flirtations went on! And so it is to-day. In spiritual relationships men flirt, but they do not wed; they pay courteous attention, but they do not choose; they give a respectful hearing, but they do not risk an issue. Everything is open, nothing concluded. And so this old-world counsel comes into our modern conditions as counsel which is pertinent to much of our inconsequent and inconclusive life.[1]

Keeping strictly to the words, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve," we find four facts contained in them—

I. All Life is Service.
II. We may choose our Master.
III. There are only Two Masters to choose between.
IV. The Choice is Urgent.

I.

All Life is Service.

Joshua does not ask the Israelites whether or not they will serve any god. It is taken as a matter of course, and assumed as a fact, that they must serve some acknowledged superior, because it is a part of man's nature to fear and serve a Superior Being, or a Superior Power. It is only "the fool" who "hath said in his heart, There is no God"—one who has utterly rebelled against

[1] J. H. Jowett.

the better side of human nature, and has crushed out the natural feelings of fear, awe, and reverence. Now this is the statement of an important truth. If men will not serve the Lord, they will nevertheless be the slaves of something—of Satan—of sin—of their own lusts—or of the riches, pleasures, or cares of this world. It has been well said: "We have not the liberty to choose whether we will serve or not; all the liberty we have is to choose our master."

¶ One often felt about Dr. Rainy the note of the soldier. I remember a fine phrase of his about life: "We must succeed as soldiers succeed." Soldiers succeed, not by gaining honours and applause, nor, it may be, by gaining even victory. Their success is obedience to the call of duty. Their profession is "the service." Principal Rainy, even as the Church leader, was always the soldier in "the service" of "the good cause."[1]

¶ It is at once strange and true that there is no state so dear to the highest type of man as that of independence. One of its greatest poetic prophets was Robert Burns, and you will call to mind his words—

> To catch dame Fortune's golden smile,
> Assiduous wait upon her;
> And gather gear by ev'ry wile
> That's justified by honour;
> Not for to hide it in a hedge,
> Nor for a train attendant;
> But for the glorious privilege
> Of being independent.

That yearning for independence runs through all his poems, and we regard it as the first and foremost of his manly virtues. Yet, sad irony, it must be confessed that poor Burns was bound hand and foot by a master quite as cruel and despotic as a golden one—the master of low passions and appetites. But the case of Burns, so far from being solitary, is universal. Men may boast of their independence, and in some particular lines they have a right to do so, still they are servants or slaves of some power.

¶ It is not the spirit of obedience that is wanting in man; he is not only willing to obey, but there is a necessity on him to do so. In his maddest dreams of freedom he enthrals himself to a Marat; in his wildest theory of individual judgment he makes a Pope of Chalmers or Wesley or Canning. Only let a man see

[1] P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, ii. 201.

what he ought to obey. Here rather is the difficulty. "I will not obey the Church," says one, "for the Church does not exercise any power over me; I do not acknowledge its authority; I do not feel its superiority." "I am not a loyal subject," says another, "because I know that the Queen is an inexperienced little girl, no wiser than one of my daughters." It is only by attesting their divine mission that institutions can be, or it may be ought to be, obeyed.[1]

Fair is our lot—O goodly is our heritage!
(Humble ye, my people, and be fearful in your mirth!)
For the Lord our God Most High
He hath made the deep as dry,
He hath smote for us a pathway to the ends of all the Earth!

Yea, though we sinned—and our rulers went from righteousness—
Deep in all dishonour though we stained our garments' hem,
Oh, be ye not dismayed,
Though we stumbled and we strayed,
We were led by evil counsellors—the Lord shall deal with them!

Hold ye the Faith—the Faith our Fathers sealèd us;
Whoring not with visions—overwise and overstale.
Except ye pay the Lord
Single heart and single sword,
Of your children in their bondage shall He ask them treble-tale!

Keep ye the Law—be swift in all obedience—
Clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford.
Make ye sure to each his own
That he reap where he hath sown;
By the peace among our peoples let men know we serve the Lord![2]

II.

We may choose our Master.

1. The Bible is full of the recognition of the responsibility of each man for his choice. We go back to the very beginning of

[1] Lord Houghton, in *Life of Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton*, ii. 486.
[2] Rudyard Kipling.

the Bible history, and we find that the Eden story all revolves round the ability of the individual to choose for himself. Now you may have any theory of the first chapters of the Bible that you please. You may call the story of Eden a parable or literal history. We shall all be agreed, however, when we recognize that the very central thought of all is that sin came into the world by disobedience, disobedience in point of power to choose in the opposite direction. A little later on we come to the Ten Commandments. A commandment implies that it may be obeyed or disobeyed. Obedience must choose in one direction or choose in another direction.

¶ From the very beginning of the Old Testament to the very end of the New there is a run of invitation, beautiful words, golden words, diamond words; the most glowing words of all the Bible are those words of invitation. But invitation implies a possibility of resistance; if an invitation cannot be resisted it cannot be accepted.

2. A sense of power to choose between good and evil is part and parcel of the primitive consciousness of the race, and the speech of the rudest tribesman implies it. It is stamped upon every language, presupposed in all social systems, and is the sure foundation upon which the earliest and the latest codes of justice rest. It is for many reasons denied in theory by the great majority of the human race, and implied in practice. Fetish-worshipper, Pantheist, Muhammadan, even the Christian has repudiated the doctrine of moral freedom, but the repudiation has been limited to the sphere of religion, and has rarely, if ever, been applied to citizenship. The savage who, if he has any theory of the world, looks upon it as a ghostly despotism against which man, apart from charms, is helpless, forgets his religion of Fate, and deters his child from evil by frowns and encourages him to good by smiles. Every expression of the countenance witnesses to the belief that man moulds himself to vice or virtue. The student of science makes the laboratory or museum his universe, and convinces himself that the power of environment is limitless, and that the human faculties which are supposed to resist or modify it are less than nothing, and he comes forth from his refuge to applaud an act of heroism in the streets, or to scathe with denunciation some foul wrong done to a widow or a little

child. The theologian in his study reads Jonathan Edwards on the Will, and convinces himself that the Infinite Sovereignty leaves no room for human freedom in the scheme of things; but he takes up his newspaper and his heart goes with every sentence meted out to a crime.

¶ The soul in its consciousness of freedom repudiates determinism. Man as a moral agent is free—free to choose, free to think, free to act. Hence the exhortations of Scripture: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve"—"I have set before you life and death, therefore choose life"—"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Power of choice implies free will and therefore responsibility. Christ in addressing men always assumed their freedom of choice—"Follow me"—"Come unto me"—"Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." And the Apostolic injunction, "Quench not the Spirit," has no meaning unless we are able to do so. Our destiny is thus largely, if not wholly, in our own hands. "I can—I ought—I will." We are not feathers in the wind, or straws on the stream, but men with souls and wills and consciences, and as men we fix our destiny by our character, and we fix our character by our actions.[1]

¶ The will in man, like some small independent nation, such as Switzerland or Holland, seems to maintain itself by means of great toil and effort. Bordered on all sides by strong encroaching nations, which threaten to absorb its very life within them, and menaced by a rude unfriendly nature, with which it must keep up a constant war, it yet continues, by the very fact of its existence, to utter a protest for man's inviolable right of freedom. Often must the will exclaim—

> Oh, mother Nature, broad indeed thy feast,
> Widespread thy table, pasture for the beast
> And death to man, most like the fruit whose thin
> Smooth shining golden rind shows fair within
> Its crimson gleaming seeds deep-hearted hid
> Harmful, whereon, a harmless guest unbid,
> The sweet bird feeds.[2]

¶ Henry Ward Beecher's father, old Dr. Lyman Beecher, was quite as remarkable as his distinguished son and his distinguished daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe. One day Dr. Lyman Beecher had an exchange with a Methodist brother. Dr. Beecher believed in fore-ordination. The two men met on a hillside, each going to

[1] D. Watson, *The Heritage of Youth*, 35.
[2] Dora Greenwell, *Liber Humanitatis*, 66.

his place of worship, according to the way that was common in those days, riding his own horse. "Now," said Dr. Beecher, "you see my doctrine is right, you see that it was fore-ordained from the foundation of the world that we should make this exchange, and we have met here on the crest of this hill, you going to my church and I going to your church." "Very well," said the Methodist preacher, "if it was fore-ordained from the foundation of the world that we were to make this exchange, I will break the fore-ordination," and he deliberately turned round and went back to his own church. Now that seems to be only toying with a profound and very perplexing principle, but underneath we come to this very simple fact, that every man must be loyal to his own conscience, and when we are discussing the fact as to whether we have the power to choose or not we get back to this, "I know I could have done differently."

3. Religion, no less than the other interests to which we give ourselves in life, is the subject-matter of human choice. We sometimes look upon it as pre-determined by language, climate, tradition, and ancestry. Max Müller speaks as though the idolatry of the Aryans grew out of their habits of speech. St. Paul perhaps displays a deeper insight into human nature when he looks upon idolatry as the product of fatuous and evil acts of choice.

The best religion is always that which men, after due inquiry and full counsel with their own consciences, choose for themselves. It has greater binding power than a religion which is merely prescribed. It is true even in common things that, after we have reached years of maturity, the best decisions are the dispassionate decisions we make for ourselves. The choice other people may make for us is of passing value only, and cannot command us like the choice we make in the exercise of our just personal liberty. Genuine religion begins with the exercise of individual judgment, although of course that judgment, when once formed, must ally itself with kindred judgments in the community and so acquire accumulative intenseness.

¶ I think full vision prevents the exercise of choice between good and evil, and the fact of our being conscious of a power to choose between the two shows that we are in the dark—we could not choose evil if we really saw it to be *only* evil. In the case of a temptation, the very force of the temptation lies in the fact

that the thing does appear good, pleasant to look upon, and likely to advance our knowledge. I would venture to suggest that you should criticize your notion of choice under the remembrance of the conditions in which we start and move in this existence. "Consent," I think, is a better word than "choice" in relation to man's so-called "free will." True, when we are standing in the natural or old Adam, it seems a choice to us; but when we come to stand in the spiritual or new Adam, we discover that our free will is not exercised in the way of choice as between two alternatives, but in the free consent to the Will of God that it is "good and acceptable and perfect." I incline to think that in the distinction between the natural and spiritual perceptions the solution of the perplexity will be found in the question of so-called free will.[1]

Still will we trust, though earth seem dark and dreary,
And the heart faint beneath His chastening rod,
Though rough and steep our pathway, worn and weary,
Still will we trust in God!

Our eyes see dimly till by faith anointed,
And our blind choosing brings us grief and pain;
Through Him alone, who hath our way appointed,
We find our peace again.

Choose for us, God, nor let our weak preferring
Cheat our poor souls of good Thou hast designed:
Choose for us, God! Thy wisdom is unerring,
And we are fools and blind.

So from our sky the night shall furl her shadows,
And day pour gladness through her golden gates;
Our rough path lead to flower-enamelled meadows,
Where joy our coming waits.

Let us press on: in patient self-denial,
Accept the hardship, shrink not from the loss;
Our guerdon lies beyond the hour of trial,
Our crown beyond the cross.[2]

[1] *Letters from a Mystic of the Present Day*, 10.
[2] W. H. Burleigh.

III.

THERE ARE ONLY TWO MASTERS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN.

1. God will accept no divided allegiance. He will have from us all or nothing in the way of service. "No man," says our Lord, "can serve two masters" (Matt. vi. 24). The alternative, as Joshua put it to Israel, was between the One True God and some of the many false gods of that age; the alternative for us, in the matter of service, is between sin and Christ. Our choice lies between these two only. Servants to the one or the other we must be.

Thou canst not choose but serve; man's lot is servitude;
But this of choice thou hast, a bad lord or a good.[1]

¶ We may engage in a thousand pursuits. There is always one of two great ruling principles which guides our thoughts, words, and actions, and gives a distinct and peculiar colouring to our whole life. And it is from these two dominating powers that we have to choose—God or the devil, the love of virtue or the love of vice.

¶ I remember so well, soon after my conversion, the exercise of mind I went through in 1844. I was ambitious and determined to get on in my profession, and I felt the three or four seasons of reading and prayer that I had set aside each day were a great hindrance to me in the way of military studies, and that if my mind was always so full of religious thought and reading I could not hope to make a name for myself. So the question came plainly before my mind, "Shall I choose to live to God, and keep up all this reading and prayer (which I felt needful because of my sinful, unruly heart), or lessen these exercises and apply myself to get on in the service?" I have never regretted the choice God helped me to make, and I believe He gave me great blessing in consequence, and has not even allowed me to fall behind my contemporaries in a professional point of view, but, as you know, has always prospered me in my work, and preserved me through perils.[2]

¶ Many lives which reach different goals start together in the closest intimacy. The characters of two lads, who are side by side in the same home or in the same school, are akin, and there

[1] Archbishop Trench.

[2] Sir John Field, *Jottings from an Indian Journal*, 127.

is no apparent reason why they should not have the same value in the world. The possibilities, humanly speaking, are interchangeable. They sing from the same book, bow in prayer on the same hearth-stone, and show the same susceptibility to good impressions. For years their lives run parallel in the same church, the same business house, the same city. But after a while they get more or less apart. One is strict, conscientious, diligent in good works. The other loves society, grows lax in his habits, neglects the house of God. Their sympathies flow in diametrically opposed channels. One pours out his life on a foreign soil in the service of the Cross; the other dies on the scaffold or in a convict prison.[1]

¶ The river Amazon and the chief tributary of the river Plate rise within a few hundred yards of each other, and the Indians often drag their canoes from one stream to the other over the intervening strip of land. For many miles the little rivers run in parallel channels, and it often seems as though they might unite into one. At last a little knoll or ridge is reached, and the waterways diverge. It is difficult to judge what issues are involved in this turning-point, for it gives complexion to the entire map of South America, and it has put the stamp of destiny upon some great empires. These two rivers never come within sight of each other again, and empty themselves into the sea more than a thousand miles apart.

2. One may say, "I do not know on whose side I am, it is so difficult to tell what is truth and what is false." But we are not required to settle difficult questions in casuistry: we are asked to take a side when we see that there are two sides and only one of them can be taken. It is not a choice of the intellect; it is a choice of the will.

Of course there are problems the elements of which have not been formulated, and to which, for the present, a simple Aye or No is impossible. But these are not questions that touch the heart of salvation. We live, it is true, in perplexing times, but much of our unsettlement is due, not to the conflict between religion and science, faith and criticism, but to personal indecision. Alternatives are put before us which enlist the passions on the one hand and the conscience on the other, and it is for us to select between them. Faith is sometimes looked upon as though it were the product of a peculiar inspiration acting upon the finer

[1] T. G. Selby.

sensibilities of a passive nature. It must be swept into men by a tidal wave of supreme emotion. Devout fatalists sit on the shore waiting till the phenomenon appears. It is pleasant to believe when the flowing tide is with us, but we must not forget the part we ourselves have to play.

It were not hard, we think, to serve Him,
If we could only see;
If He would stand with that gaze intense
Burning into our bodily sense,
If we might look on that face most tender,
The brow where the scars are turned to splendour,
Might catch the light of His smile so sweet,
And view the marks in His hands and feet,
How loyal we should be!
It were not hard, we think, to serve Him,
If we could only see!

It were not hard, He says, to see Him,
If we would only serve;
"He that doeth the will of Heaven,
To him shall knowledge and sight be given!"
While for His presence we sit repining,
Never we see His countenance shining;
They who toil where His reapers be,
The glow of His smile may always see,
And their faith can never swerve.
It were not hard, He says, to see Him,
If we would only serve.

¶ I could not tell you too strongly my own deep and deepening conviction that the truths which I teach are true. Every year they shed fresh light on one another, and seem to stretch into immensity. They explain to me life, God, and the Bible; and I am certain that what fresh light I shall receive will be an expansion and not a contradiction of what I have. As for the words in which I try to make others see what I see, they are indeed poor and bewildered enough. But there is no bewilderment in my mind, though much that is incomplete. The principles are rooted in human nature, God, and the being of things, and I find them at the root of every page in Scripture. The *principles* cannot be reversed. My mind has grown by a regular development year by year, and I could as easily doubt my own existence as doubt those truths which have grown with my growth, and strengthened with

my strength. They are not opinions nor theories, but convictions —part of my being, of my habits of thought and life—colouring everything, "the fountain light of all my day, the master light of all my seeing." These are the truths for which men go to the stake, and relinquish, joyfully, friends, sympathy, good name, worldly prospects. They do not depend upon the accuracy of an intellectual process, but upon the verdict of all the highest powers of soul. For instance, I would not give up a single thing on the certainty that St. Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews. These are matters of intellectual investigation, and I am not sure that I am right, because I am neither certain that all the evidence is before me, nor that I have rightly judged from the evidence. But if I am asked to surrender *convictions*, I cannot do it for any reward, nor for fear of any loss; these depend upon all I know of God; they are the things seen in the noonday light of my soul; and I cannot pretend to submit my judgment in such things to wiser men or better men. It would be mock humility. I might just as readily, at their bidding, say that green is scarlet. It may be so; but if it be, my whole vision is deranged by which I have walked and lived, and by which this world is beautiful. To say that I am ready for any martyrdom in the defence of my *convictions*, and that I cannot affect to have doubts or misgivings about them, is only to say that they *are* convictions.[1]

> And they serve men austerely,
> After their own genius, clearly,
> Without a false humility;
> For this is Love's nobility,—
> Not to scatter bread and gold,
> Goods and raiment bought and sold;
> But to hold fast his simple sense,
> And speak the speech of innocence,
> And with hand and body and blood,
> To make his bosom-counsel good.
> He that feeds men serveth few;
> He serves all who dares be true.[2]

¶ When Judas, knowing the Christ to be innocent, dared to sell Him to the Jews for thirty pieces of silver; when the Bishop of Beauvais, knowing Joan of Arc to be innocent, sold her to the English for £2400—there is no doubt as to the choice these men had made. When the constituents of James A. Garfield wished him to vote in the American Senate contrary to the dictates of his conscience, and when Garfield stood before them and said:

[1] F. W. Robertson, in *Life and Letters*, 368. [2] Emerson.

"Gentlemen, if I become your representative, it must be because your opinions coincide with mine, and not because I have pared mine down into similarity with yours; I must obey the dictates of my conscience; for obedience to its voice I am responsible to God, and I must not, I dare not, muffle its teachings, bury my beliefs, or cover my convictions"—you will have no hesitation in saying which side he had chosen. There is little difficulty in deciding as to whom you serve.[1]

3. With the people to whom these words were addressed the issue was very simple—Will you follow the gods of the nations, or will you follow Jehovah your God? The problem is slightly different to-day, but it is the same old problem, and to us, as to those people, rings out the message, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve"! Shall it be a life spent in the service of self or in the service of humanity? It is not possible to serve God without serving man; it is not possible to worship God without serving man. There never was a prayer offered to God when the heart was at enmity with man. There is no knowledge of God which does not come through man. That is the principle of the incarnation, and, therefore, when we are to choose the service of God, we mean by that the service of man, because God cannot be served and man neglected. If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen? Shall our lives be given to Christ and to humanity, or shall they be given to self and to sin?

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
  I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
  Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
  Unto his nest again,
  I shall not live in vain.[2]

IV.

The Choice is Urgent.

1. *It is urgent because it has to be made now.*—"Choose you *this day*." All our decisions are instant; the processes leading up

[1] G. H. Morgan. [2] Emily Dickinson.

to decision may be very slow, but the decisions are all instant. A boat changes its course in an instant. It may have been a long time getting ready to make the change, but the change in the course is always instantaneously made. A man is seen to have made a change; it has been growing through long years, but the real change has been instantaneous.

¶ You cannot run away from a weakness; you must some time fight it out or perish; and if that be so, why not now, and where you stand?[1]

¶ It was at the beginning of these somewhat reckless years that I came to the great decision of my life. I remember it well. Our Sunday-School class had been held in the vestry as usual. The lesson was finished, and we had marched back into the chapel to sing, answer questions, and to listen to a short address. I was sitting at the head of the seat, and can even now see Mr. Meikle taking from his breast-pocket a copy of the *United Presbyterian Record*, and hear him say that he was going to read an interesting letter to us from a missionary in Fiji. The letter was read. It spoke of cannibalism, and of the power of the Gospel, and at the close of the reading, looking over his spectacles, and with wet eyes, he said, "I wonder if there is a boy here this afternoon who will yet become a missionary, and by and by bring the Gospel to cannibals?" And the response of my heart was, "Yes, God helping me, I will." So impressed was I that I spoke to no one, but went right away towards home. The impression became greater the farther I went, until I got to the bridge over the Aray above the mill, and near to the Black Bull. There I went over the wall attached to the bridge, and kneeling down prayed God to accept me, and to make me a missionary to the heathen.[2]

Ere another step I take
  In my wilful wandering way,
Still I have a choice to make—
  Shall I alter while I may?

Patient love is waiting still
  In my Saviour's heart for me:
Love to bend my froward will,
  Love to make me really free.

Far from Him, what can I gain?
  Want and shame and bondage vile—

[1] R. L. Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant.*

[2] James Chalmers, *Autobiography and Letters*, 23.

Better far to bear the pain
Of His yoke a little while.[1]

2. *It is urgent because it is for eternity.*—Every choice, says the great German philosopher poet, is for eternity. Yet men often realize that only when it is too late. They have let everything go by default. They are in theory Christians; they imagine that they have taken sides; but when the moment of choice comes, when the temptation is at hand, they shrink from the effort of decision for God, and they give way to evil. Then the momentum of that false choice carries them further. It is not merely that, by the law of habit, acts tend to reproduce themselves. That is true, and it is true of good as well as of evil acts. But every choice has a twofold consequence. It reacts upon the conscience and it reacts upon the will. To choose the higher is to give definiteness and precision and a diviner insight to the conscience, even while it gives to the will new power to be free. But the conscience, once silenced, speaks in a lower tone, judges less certainly and less truly; and the will, in that its wilfulness opposed itself and chose the lower line, is weaker by the act, and has so far lost its freedom. For the freedom of the will, which we vaguely talk about, is a freedom to be *won*; the Divine light of conscience is at first a spark that may be quenched or kindled. The perfect freedom that can choose God, the perfect light that reveals Him,—these belong only to the Perfect Man "who knew no sin."

Heard are the voices,
Heard are the sage's,
The world's, and the age's.
Choose well: your choice is
Brief and yet endless.[2]

[1] A. L. Waring.

[2] Goethe, translated by Carlyle.

As for Me and My House.

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As for Me and My House.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.—Josh. xxiv. 15.

1. It is an impressive experience to stand round the bed of a dying veteran whom we have followed and loved. Viewed from that vantage-ground, the mighty things of the world seem weak, and the gilded and glorious to be but hollow tinsel. The life of that man, spent as it has been in the service of God, casts a halo around this scene which cannot be described. The life may have been unpretentious, utterly lacking in the show and outward glory which brings earthly renown; but we feel his life has been good in a way which will bear the searching light of the Great White Throne, and we are satisfied. With what interest and anxiety do we listen to every word that falls from his failing lips. There are reminiscences of the past, and the eyes sparkle at the remembrance of God's goodness in times of storm and stress. Then come wise counsels for the future. And as the sons and daughters who have come from distant parts stand round, linked by the strongest of all ties—the tie of mutual grief—some such prayer as Bickersteth's ascends for them—

> Let not one of these
> Be wanting in the day Thou countest up
> The jewels in Thy diadem of saints.
> I ask not for the glories of the world,
> I ask not freedom from its weariness
> Of daily toil; but, oh Lord Jesu Christ,
> Let Thy omnipotent prayer prevail for them
> And keep them from the evil. In the hour
> Of trial, when the subtle tempter's voice
> Sounds like a seraph's, and no human friend
> Is nigh, let my words live before Thee then,
> And hide my lambs beneath Thy shadowing wings,
> And keep them as the apple of Thine eye.
> My prayers are ended if Thy will be done

In them and by them. Till at last we meet
Within the mansions of our Father's home,
A circle never to be sundered more,
No broken link, a family in Heaven.

2. Our text expresses the resolution of the great captain Joshua, when God had given His people rest from their enemies round about, and all the good things had come upon them which the Lord their God had promised them. Such were the words which he was not ashamed to utter in the assembly of Israel, when he had summoned them together at Shechem. He had called on them to make a deliberate choice between idolatry and the service of Jehovah. On this point, his own mind was made up. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." It must have been a noble sight to see the well-tried champion of Israel, ripe in years and in honours, adding to all his proofs of courage this greatest one, of standing out before the armies of his people and owning himself a godly man; crowning the exploits of a heroic life by a boldness no less heroic, on His behalf on whom life depends. And it must have been a remarkable sight, too, to witness that day the gathering of the tribes to Shechem. Veterans who had fought in the wars of the Lord once more embraced their aged captain. Long-severed friends in arms and danger once more greeted one another. Round these were the assembled multitudes of Israel. They stood and listened to him who reminded them of the age which was gone by, and took pledges of them for the age which was to come.

Give thanks, O heart, for the high souls
That point us to the deathless goals—
For all the courage of their cry
That echoes down from sky to sky;
Thanksgiving for the armed seers
And heroes called to mortal years—
Souls that have built our faith in man
And lit the ages as they ran.

Give thanks for heroes that have stirred
Earth with the wonder of a word.
But all thanksgiving for the breed
Who have bent destiny with deed—

Souls of the high, heroic birth,
Souls sent to poise the shaken earth,
And then called back to God again
To make heaven possible for men.

I.

As for Me.

1. This short phrase occurs again and again in Scripture. "As for me, I" (unlike the enemies of God) "will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy" (Ps. v. 7). "As for me, I" (unlike those whose portion is in this life) "will behold thy face in righteousness" (Ps. xvii. 15). We might add to such quotations many others where the same or similar Hebrew occurs, but is otherwise rendered in our Version. Such a passage is Psalm lxxiii. 28, where we may read, "As for me, nearness to God for me is good." Others may, if they will, go wandering from Him, devoting themselves to the world, to self, to sin, as their life and choice. My preference and resolve are otherwise. "Nearness to God for me is good."

¶ The one thing needful—whether we seek the love of God or of man—is unfaltering courage, that quality which alone places great things within our reach.[1]

¶ When William Wilberforce was brought to Christ, he went with fear and trembling to his friend, the great statesman of the day, William Pitt, to tell him of the change. For two hours his friend endeavoured to convince him that he was becoming visionary, fanatical, if not insane. But the young convert was steadfast and immovable. He had spent his twenty-fifth birthday at the top wave and highest flow of those amusements—the race-course and the ballroom—which had swallowed up a large portion of his youth. He had laughed and sung, and been envied for his gaiety and happiness. But true happiness he had never found till he found Christ. And now he laid his wealth and wit and eloquence and influence at the feet of his Lord, his motto being—"Whatsoever others do, as for me, I will serve the Lord."

2. The phrase thus tends to put before us a certain contrast and separation. The speaker places himself, in some respects, aside and apart. He looks around him, and sees other men

[1] Lady Dilke, *The Book of the Spiritual Life*, 164.

following this or that line of thought and action. Their numbers are large. Their action, their spirit and sentiment, have all the weight and force of a fashion. He cannot help it. He must take another line. However singular he may make himself, so must it be. "As for me, I will serve the Lord."

> Light words they were, and lightly, falsely said;
> She heard them, and she started,—and she rose,
> As in the act to speak; the sudden thought
> And unconsidered impulse led her on.
> In act to speak she rose, but with the sense
> Of all the eyes of that mixed company
> Now suddenly turned upon her, some with age
> Hardened and dulled, some cold and critical;
> Some in whom vapours of their own conceit,
> As moist malarious mists the heavenly stars,
> Still blotted out their good, the best at best
> By frivolous laugh and prate conventional
> All too untuned for all she thought to say—
> With such a thought the mantling blood to her cheek
> Flushed up, and o'er-flushed itself, blank night her soul
> Made dark, and in her all her purpose swooned.
> She stood as if for sinking. Yet anon
> With recollections clear, august, sublime,
> Of God's great truth, and right immutable,
> Which, as obedient vassals, to her mind
> Came summoned of her will, in self-negation
> Quelling her troublous earthy consciousness,
> She queened it o'er her weakness. At the spell,
> Back rolled the ruddy tide, and leaves her cheek
> Paler than erst, and yet not ebbs so far
> But that one pulse of one indignant thought
> Might hurry it hither in flood. So as she stood
> She spoke. God in her spoke, and made her heard.[1]

3. Joshua, like his friend Caleb, "followed the Lord fully"; he might have taken for his motto the word "*thorough*." He belonged to Jehovah, heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. As the successor of Moses, and the type of the Lord Jesus, he put on zeal as a cloak, and girded himself with fidelity as with a garment. His appointed duty was fulfilled with martial strictness and unswerving steadiness; he had a single eye and a firm hand. He

[1] Clough, *Poems*, 11.

was strong and of good courage, and the Lord was with him. It was no idle boast when the old warrior and prince in Israel said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

¶ Among modern soldiers there is not a more honoured name than Henry Havelock. In the words of the Governor-General of India, "He was every inch a soldier, and every inch a Christian." From the time of his religious decision he was not ashamed to own his heavenly Father, but was concerned only to walk worthy of Him. Show him the path of duty, and he held consequence as light as air. He had only one object of fear, and that was sin. Personal danger was as the idle wind. When the deliverance of our Indian Empire from a fearful rebellion seemed to depend on the success of the army which he led, he could find time before the earliest march to commune with his God in prayer, and in the reading of His word, and thus to strengthen himself for the terrible work he had in hand. His motto was, "As for me, I will serve the Lord."

¶ Sir Walter Scott, quoting a Scottish proverb in his journal says: "Hain your reputation, tyne your reputation," *i.e.* to be very careful and timorous about reputation is the way to lose it. Is it not he also who testifies: "I never knew name nor fame burn brighter for over chary keeping"?

4. Never for a moment is the Christian called to isolation, peculiarity, opposition, for their own sake. "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good, to edification." It is the believer's business to be the most considerate, sympathetic, courteous, and companionable of people, within the lines of the will of God. Let this be well remembered, with reflection, and sanctified good sense, and prayer. Otherwise, we may be merely disagreeable, and mistake this for fidelity to principle. We may be justly avoided for our own sakes, and think that this is "bearing the reproach of Christ," and "going forth to him without the gate." But when all this is said, how great and sacred is the place in our hearts and wills which must be kept for "as for me"! Considerateness and sympathy are as different as possible from drift and compromise. They should be, and often are, most conspicuous in lives which are all the while governed absolutely by personal surrender to the will of God, such surrender as can lay quietly down at His feet all that is most cherished in reputation and ease, when it comes to a real alternative between Him and the world.

Independence and isolation may be nothing better than stoic egotism. A man may separate himself from his fellows through self-conceit alone. Pope has a couplet which says of certain persons—

> They so despise the crowd, that should the throng
> By chance go right, they purposely go wrong.

Again, the effect is hardly less injurious of the inflexibility of those who in simple ignorance oppose the public way. Men get into their minds all sorts of distorted views, half-truths, and opinions which they call "conscientious convictions," and they protest that nothing shall move them from their faith or purpose. Their stubbornness arises from no unsociability of disposition, but simply through imperfect light. There is a good deal of emphatic personality and dogged independence in the world which is thus only a distortion. You see it in very marked development in present-day religious enterprise and Christian work. Men are every day rushing out of the orderly ranks, discarding long-established methods, and originating all sorts of infallible expedients for doing what the wiser Church is unable to do, or is not doing fast enough to satisfy their enthusiasm. And so these persons choose to toil alone, or to force their own crude theories and ill-considered schemes on their unwilling neighbours. All this is but a perverted egotism and a public hurt, though there is in it, as in most evils, an element of good.

¶ There never was a more thorough Christian, or a more decided, than Tyndall's predecessor in the presidency of the Royal Institution—Michael Faraday. And while there are two or three eminent and prominent scientific men who are numbered with doubters, and whose names are regarded by those who wish it so as a sufficient justification of doubt, one of our greatest astronomers says he could appeal to the great majority of living men who are devoting God's noblest gift of genius to the elucidation of God's works, to prove that the pursuit of science has no inherent tendency towards religious scepticism. "As for my own part," he adds, "and I hope I say it without affectation—I am sure I say it with no reserve—from the results of modern research I have gathered additional reason for resting in the simplicity of the Christian Faith, and in modern discoveries I have found many a new and unexpected trace of the Creator's Majesty, of His power, His wisdom, and His love."

II.

As for Me and My House.

1. "As for me and my house," says Joshua; not "as for me" only. He carries his household with him, as the head of the house, and as the servant of God in the family circle.

(1) *He is the head of his house.*—He clearly signifies that he is the head over his family, that its oneness of decision is due to his ruling. There is to be no hesitation on this point. The Bible never permits the position of husband, as director of the family, to be trenched upon. His is the order which is to decide the course to be followed, his the firm hand which is to hold the reins, his the final word that is to bring differences to a settlement.

¶ An ideal picture of the father as the high priest in the home is given by John G. Paton, the South Sea missionary, in the story of his childhood's days in the south of Scotland: "Our home consisted of a 'but' and a 'ben,' and a 'mid room,' or chamber, called the 'closet.' . . . The 'closet' was a very small apartment betwixt the other two, having room only for a bed, a little table, and a chair, with a diminutive window shedding diminutive light on the scene. This was the Sanctuary of that cottage home. Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and 'shut to the door'; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tiptoe, not to disturb the holy colloquy. The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light as of a new-born smile that always was dawning on my father's face; it was a reflection from the Divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived."[1]

But let us not mistake the nature of his authority. It is not that of a lord over slaves. It is not that of a superior race over an inferior. It is not that which needs to be constantly parading itself as if it had no real foundation. It is an authority which recognizes fully and cheerfully that a wife is one with her

[1] *John G. Paton.* 10.

husband, that the children have rights which no man gave to them and which no man should presume to take away. Thus the unity which resides in the head will be pervaded with sympathy for all the members of the house, and complete and tender harmony will prevail. It will be plain that the father does not need to claim authority; it will be dearer to the others than to himself. The mother and children will not need to take roundabout means to secure their rights; they will be acknowledged and carefully guarded by the father. And when, under the spell of this unity, a man speaks in his own name of the religious life which he and his house will choose, he does so in the assurance that they will agree with him—that he can, with the fullest decision, give utterance to the resolution, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

¶ Joshua's words have had a long and active life. Not only are they enshrined imperishably in the Book of God; they are frequently to be seen as a watchword in our modern homes, amidst the stir and movement of our life to-day, inscribed perhaps on card or tablet, and hung where the visitor cannot help seeing them, in an entrance hall, in a dining-room, or where not: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The way of the world may run otherwise, and my choice may be out of the mode altogether. It does not matter; this is my choice: "we will serve the Lord." Happy the home where the motto is realized in the household life, and happy the heart and character where it lies deep at the springs of individual thought and action every day.[1]

(2) *He is a man of God at home and in the midst of his family.*—No resolution to serve Christ, no profession of serving Him can be genuine on our part if they do not lead into a position like that which Joshua took. How could I be counted a truthful man if I spake truthfully in the street and told lies in the house? Who could regard me as a friend if I shook hands with them when we were by ourselves and turned my back on them when in company? And what right have I to consider myself a servant of Christ if I say I will be loyal to Him, but do not endeavour to carry my family with me into that service? In the family we put off certain kinds of restraints which we put on when we engage in business or mingle in society. We feel that

[1] H. C. G. Moule.

we have no need to be other than we are there. If we ought to be the same men everywhere—true to what we believe—then, assuredly, if there is any place in which we should be more pronounced Christians than in another, it is in our home. If we are to walk worthy of Him whose we are and whom we serve, that straight walking ought to be shown in its most perfect development, not in prayer-meeting or church, not in pew or pulpit, but where every word tells, every habit makes a stamp—in the free circle of family life.

¶ The epitaph Ruskin inscribed over his father's grave in the churchyard of Shirley, near Croydon, is beautiful and characteristic: "Here rests from day's well-sustained burden John James Ruskin, born in Edinburgh, May 10th, 1785. He died in his house in London, March 3rd, 1864. He was an entirely honest merchant, and his memory is to all who keep it dear and helpful. His son, whom he loved to the uttermost, and taught to speak truth, says this of him."[1]

¶ One of Principal Rainy's daughters writes: "I feel it difficult to write of these things, for I have no words to tell you of them. To us he was just 'Father.' I suppose most children begin by thinking their father the most wise and strong and tender of beings, and with us that went on to the very end, with an always increasing sense of how unusual *such* wisdom and strength and tenderness were. For myself, it is to him I owe all my earliest ideas of what the Fatherhood of God might mean. They all came translated to me so inevitably, so securely, through that dear and familiar medium that never once failed me all my life—never once came short of my hopes or my needs. And it was so with us all. I remember how a sister once wrote to me, 'I know you read the thirteenth verse of the 103rd Psalm as I do—Like as *my* Father pitieth his children—and that means just everything.'"[2]

He never made a fortune, or a noise
In the world where men are seeking after fame;
But he had a healthy brood of girls and boys
Who loved the very ground on which he trod.
They thought him just a little short of God;
Oh, you should have heard the way they said his name—
"Father."

[1] A. C. Benson, *Ruskin: A Study in Personality*, 102.
[2] *The Life of Principal Rainy*, ii. 93.

There seemed to be a loving little prayer
In their voices, even when they called him "Dad."
Though the man was never heard of anywhere,
As a hero, yet you somehow understood
He was doing well his part and making good;
And you knew it, by the way his children had
Of saying "Father."

He gave them neither eminence nor wealth,
But he gave them blood untainted with a vice,
And the opulence of undiluted health.
He was honest, and unpurchable and kind;
He was clean in heart, and body, and in mind.
So he made them heirs to riches without price—
This father.

He never preached or scolded; and the rod—
Well, he used it as a turning-pole in play.
But he showed the tender sympathy of God
To his children in their troubles, and their joys.
He was always chum and comrade with his boys,
And his daughters—oh, you ought to hear them say
"Father."

Now I think of all achievements 'tis the least
To perpetuate the species; it is done
By the insect and the serpent, and the beast.
But the man who keeps his body, and his thought,
Worth bestowing on an offspring love-begot,
Then the highest earthly glory he has won,
When in pride a grown-up daughter or a son
Says "That's Father." [1]

2. One of the ways in which we may serve the Lord in the family circle is by setting up His worship in our house, by taking care that we have our whole house join day by day in serving Him with prayer and thanksgiving and praise.

All of us, even the least learned, may offer up some short prayer to God in the name of His blessed Son; or we may sing or repeat some psalm or godly hymn together; and some one of the family may read a few verses out of the Gospels to the rest. Let this be done daily. First let us rouse and calm our hearts—

[1] Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

calm all worldly thoughts in them, and rouse them to heavenly thoughts—by reading some of our Saviour's blessed words; and then, when our hearts have been thus quieted and stirred, let us offer up a prayer. It is not many words, or fine words, that Christ cares for, any more now than when He was on earth. The widow's mite, if it be offered up from the heart, is still, as then, more precious in His eyes than all the costly offerings of the rich.

¶ Whatever we wish others to practise, we must practise ourselves, and nothing is so well calculated to impress the young with a conviction of the importance of prayer as the being called together, morning and evening, to unite in family worship. Christians who neglect this duty will have a great deal to answer for in the day of final account. I have a boyish recollection of the shudder which crept over me on hearing a playmate say of his father, who was a member of the Church, "My father never prays!"[1]

¶ Every Christian family should be a little church. In Scotland this thought blossomed out more abundantly after the bitter experiences of the seventeenth century, during which so many families were obliged to furnish their own religious ordinances. So the Christian father became the pastor or minister, and his family met, either alone or along with others like-minded, for such simple rites as laymen could transact. When the storm had passed, the habit of family worship had become firmly fixed in all pious homes. Especially the houses of the clergy were associated with this daily prayer, and sometimes the parishioners resorted to a godly minister's house to join in these domestic services. This was the survival of that habit of daily public prayers, which soon vanished from the life of the Scottish Church, and is only now being restored here and there in the large towns.[2]

¶ Dr. Paul, in his *Past and Present of Aberdeenshire*, says: "In my early days family worship was, in this quarter, much neglected, even among the clergy: among the laity it was seldom heard of." In agreement with that statement, Dr. Kidd found that his house, for years after he came to Aberdeen, was a centre of wondering interest to the neighbourhood, when, in the course of family worship, the psalm was sung. People gathered round the door to hear the unfamiliar sounds on a week-day, and in a private

[1] J. N. Norton.

[2] H. M. B. Reid, *Lost Habits of the Religious Life*, 45.

house. With characteristic hospitality and readiness to seize any opportunity of doing good that came in his way, Dr. Kidd opened the door and invited them to come in.[1]

3. What are the difficulties in the way of having family worship?

(1) The want of time for it. The father is obliged to hurry off to his work in the morning, and he comes home weary at night, and this is often considered a sufficient excuse for allowing his household to grow up without the blessing of family prayer. But the whole exercise, including the reading of a chapter of the Bible, or the Psalter for the day, need not occupy more than fifteen minutes. Will any one venture to declare that he cannot afford *this* amount of time for attending to so important a duty?

(2) There is the fear of exciting surprise among family and friends, and of being thought "righteous overmuch." But is it right to give way to such apprehensions? Ashamed to follow the example of the Patriarchs of old—of David, when seated on the throne of Israel—of Joshua, a general of unequalled courage and success? Ashamed to do what the greatest and best of all ages have done before us? The only thing to be ashamed of is that we have neglected this duty so long.

III.

We will serve the Lord.

And who is the Lord whom Joshua and his household are ready to serve? Joshua names two points in His character. They are unexpected. They seem to repel rather than attract the worshipper. They are chosen that the reality and sincerity of the worshipper may be tested.

(1) He is a *holy God.*—The Scriptural idea of the holiness of God has a wider sweep than we often recognize. It fundamentally means His supreme and inaccessible elevation above the creature; which, of course, is manifested in His perfect separation from all sin, but has not regard to this alone. Joshua here urges the infinite distance between man and God, and especially the infinite moral distance, in order to enforce

[1] J. Stark, *Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen*, 242.

a profounder conception of what goes to God's service. A holy God cannot have unholy worshippers. His service can be no mere ceremonial, but must be the bowing of the whole man before His majesty, the aspiration of the whole man after His loftiness, the transformation of the whole man into the reflection of His purity, the approach of the unholy to the Holy through a sacrifice which puts away sin.

(2) He is a *jealous God.*—"Jealous" is an ugly word, with repulsive associations, and its application to God has sometimes been explained in ugly fashion, and has actually repelled men. But, rightly looked at, what does it mean but that God desires our whole hearts for His own, and loves us so much, and is so desirous to pour His love into us, that He will have no rivals in our love? The metaphor of marriage, which puts His love to men in the tenderest form, underlies this word, so harsh on the surface, but so gracious at the core.

The jealousy exercised in the interests of others must be holy and beneficent. God will brook no intrusion into His work, no division of His authority, no departure from His laws. He alone can guide us through the rocks and whirlpools, and bring us to the far-off goal. That He should be supreme is the very salvation of the universe.

¶ In the darkness of a blustering winter's night I was once coming down the rapids of a Chinese river. There were several scores of market people in the same boat returning to their homes. The boatmen, who made their journey ten or a dozen times a month, were versed in the swish of every eddy and the roar of every separate whirlpool, the boom of the current on each obstructing rock, and the hurly-burly of the waters as they spread themselves out over the broad gravel beds, and were at home on almost every square inch of the water-way. Sometimes we came down full swing between chasms of rock where we had not more than half a foot of margin. A mistaken tug at the rudder, too energetic a use of the oar on the wrong side at the wrong moment, failure to calculate the margin of the water-way to a shade, and we should have been dashed to bits on the rocks. Now if I, a stranger, had laid a hand upon the rudder, or had snatched an oar from one of the boatmen, and had begun to make proof of a skill I had cultivated on English rivers, the boatmen would have been profoundly jealous of my intervention. And rightly so; for they possessed a special knowledge in which I was wanting.

Their common humanity, a sense of their responsibility for the souls on board, the dread of a more formidable form of trial for manslaughter than that of European courts, compelled them to a temper of keen and passionate jealousy, and the temper did them all honour.[1]

[1] T. G. Selby, *The Lesson of a Dilemma*, 118.

The Sin of Meroz.

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The Sin of Meroz.

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,
Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof;
Because they came not to the help of the Lord,
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.—Judg. v. 23.

1. Israel's struggle against the Canaanitish king Jabin closes the first period of the history of the Judges. Of that struggle the central figure is the speaker in the text—Deborah, prophetess and mother in Israel. This extraordinary woman might have ranked, so far as natural strength of character is concerned, with those of her sex who, by splendid examples, whether of energy, of intellect, or of sanctity, have from time to time reversed the ordinary relations of men and women, and have left their mark for ever upon the history of the world. She belongs to the same class, in respect of natural ascendancy, as Joan of Arc, as Elizabeth of England, as Catharine the Second of Russia, not to mention humbler but, speaking religiously, greater names. She had, besides her natural gifts, the gift of prophecy, as before her had Miriam the sister of the Lawgiver; as had Huldah the wife of Shallum in a later age. Her husband Lapidoth is mentioned; he is mentioned only to be forgotten: Deborah's was a life shaped by the pursuit of public rather than of domestic objects.

2. Of the actual extent of her influence, of her relation in particular to the northern tribes, of the cause which immediately determined her to proclaim a rising against the Canaanites, we really know nothing. She summoned Barak, her fellow-tribesman, to advance from Kedesh, in the extreme north of the country, upon Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men, in order to attack Sisera. Barak refused, unless the prophetess would herself accompany him; soldier as he was, he lacked the needful strength

and convictions to brace him for the conflict. Deborah warned him that he would thus forfeit the honours of victory. But she joined him at Kedesh. Upon their reaching Mount Tabor, Sisera brought up the associated Canaanitish forces, and nine hundred chariots of iron. Barak rushed from the heights into the valley; and at Taanach, by the brook Megiddo, a desperate encounter resulted in the utter defeat of Sisera.

3. Sisera fled away, completely routed, and the wild fierce strong woman who "judged Israel at that time," and the captain of the Israelitish army, sang a splendid proud song of triumph. In it they recount the tribes who had come up to their duty, who had shared the labour and the glory of the fight. And then, in the midst of the torrent of song, there comes this other strain of fiery indignation. One town or village, Meroz, had hung back. Hidden away in some safe valley, it had heard the call which summoned every patriot, but it knew it was in no danger. It had felt the shock of battle on the other side of the hills, and nestled and hid itself only the more snugly. "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

¶ Joan of Arc was not stuck at the Cross Roads either by rejecting all the paths like Tolstoy or by accepting them all like Nietzsche. She chose a path and went down it like a thunderbolt. Yet Joan, when I come to think of her, had in her all that was true either in Tolstoy or Nietzsche—all that was even tolerable in either of them. I thought of all that is noble in Tolstoy: the pleasure in plain things, especially in plain pity, the actualities of the earth, the reverence for the poor, the dignity of the bowed back. Joan of Arc had all that, and with this great addition: that she endured poverty while she admired it, whereas Tolstoy is only a typical aristocrat trying to find out its secret. And then I thought of all that was brave and proud and pathetic in poor Nietzsche and his mutiny against the emptiness and timidity of our time. I thought of his cry for the ecstatic equilibrium of danger, his hunger for the rush of great horses, his cry to arms. Well, Joan of Arc had all that; and, again, with this difference, that she did not praise fighting, but fought. We *know* that she was not afraid of an army, while Nietzsche for all we know was afraid of a cow. Tolstoy only praised the peasant; she was the

peasant. Nietzsche only praised the warrior; she was the warrior. She beat them both at their own antagonistic ideals; she was more gentle than the one, more violent than the other. Yet she was a perfectly practical person who did something, while they are wild speculators who do nothing.[1]

I.

What was the Sin of Meroz?

i. Neglect of Duty.

1. Meroz was neutral, impassive, useless. It did not turn traitor; it did not play the spy; it did not succour the foe. It was neither Israelite nor Canaanite. It was neither on this side nor on that. It did not fight. It just did nothing.

Meroz is gone. No record of it except this verse remains. The most ingenious and indefatigable explorer cannot even guess where it once stood. But the curse remains—the violent outburst of the contempt and anger which men feel who have fought and suffered and agonized, and then see other men, who have the same interest in the result as they have, coming out cool and unwounded from their safe hiding-places to take a part of the victory which they have done nothing to secure. Meroz stands for that. It sometimes happens that a man or a town passes completely away from the face of the earth and from the memory of men, and only leaves a name which stands for ever as a sort of symbol or synonym of some quality, some virtue or some vice. So Meroz stands for the shirker; for him who is willing to see other people fight the battles of life, while he simply comes in to take the spoils.

¶ "The old war-horse was out to-day," I used to say when the Dean had shaken his head with an upward look of grave defiance, as at some threatening onset that he foresaw bearing down. The war-horse! Yes! That was again and again the picture that rose in my mind as the slight figure drew itself together, and the eyes flashed. There would be no flinching in him when the trumpet began to blow: that was clear, as his mouth grew stern. After all, behind all the smiling veils, this world (one felt) is an arena in which the battle of the Lord goes forward. We shall not get through without a tussle, a fierce bout. Evil is strong,

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*.

and may come in like a flood: and in the great day of Armageddon he at least would not be found unready or unarmed.[1]

2. There are many people always who are in the community and in the world what Meroz was in Palestine. For there is an everlasting struggle going on against wickedness and wretchedness. It never ceases. It changes, but it never ceases. It shifts from one place to another. It dies out in one form only to burst out in some other shape. It seems to flag sometimes as if the enemy were giving way, but it never really stops—the endless struggle of all that is good in the world against the enemies of God, against sin and error and want and woe. And the strange and sad thought which sometimes comes upon our minds is that few people after all are really heartily engaged in that struggle. How few have cast themselves into it with all their hearts, how many there are who stand apart and wish it well but never expose themselves for it or do anything to help it!

¶ There is not one of us for whom Meroz has not a lesson. It is short, sharp, decisive. No words need labour it, nor can any words lend it emphasis. Every social sore, every remediable injustice, every unequal law, every unwholesome influence, every bad example, every false moral standard, every assertion of religious intolerance, every attempt at religious supremacy—these summon us in our several stations to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Thrice blest is he who can divine
  Where real right doth lie,
And dares to take the side that seems
  Wrong to man's blindfold eye.

For right is right, since God is God,
  And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty;
  To falter would be sin.[2]

ii. The Duty was Patriotism.

Meroz failed first of all in the duty of patriotism. If we are tempted to think that Deborah's language was unwarrantable, let us consider what we ourselves should say under similar

[1] *Life and Letters of Dean Church*, 226.

[2] F. W. Faber.

circumstances. Let us suppose that this country had been successfully invaded by a foreign enemy; that during his occupation every form of social and personal misery had been inflicted; that, not to speak of the ruin of our credit, of our trade, of our national character, the exercise of our religion, the sanctity of our homes, the freedom of our persons, had been imperilled or sacrificed; and that at last, under whatever leadership, an organized rising against the invader had been successful, at least within limits, and that he had sustained a decisive reverse. And let us further suppose that at the very crisis of his discomfiture, when everything depended upon making his position untenable and upon converting a first disaster into irremediable defeat, some single English town, lying in the very valley along which the torrent of war was sweeping, should refuse assistance or even sympathy to the national forces. Do you think that English public men, or English public writers, reviewing the campaign when all was over, would be sparing of denunciation, after their own fashion, of such treachery to the national cause? Would they not insist upon the preciousness, the sanctity, of the national life; upon the folly and wickedness of preaching any doctrine which could destroy or impair it; upon the duty of laying aside all private opinions, grudges, hesitations, in presence of so absorbing, so overwhelming a catastrophe as an invasion?

¶ Let us put ourselves back among the besieged at Ladysmith. Supposing that there was a man in the garrison there who refused to take his part, what would be the five reasons which would make him incur even the curse of the women and children? First of all there was a battle to fight. We have no concern with the rightness or wrongness of the war when we are fighting a battle in a place like Ladysmith; clearly, the duty of every one in that place was to guard the women and children and to hold out till they died. Then, secondly, they were face to face with a strong and powerful foe. In the third place, they had a brave captain who was leading them, and who was doing his very best to inspire his men with courage. In the fourth place, every day there was the possibility that at any moment the enemy might come in like a flood and sweep the whole place away. And lastly, the women and children, whom every true-hearted man was bound to protect, were in danger unless each man stood at his post. I can therefore imagine the kind of curse which would have been uttered over any shirker in the place: "Curse ye that

man because he comes not to the help of his country; because he stands not by the women and the children in their hour of danger." The indifferent, we all feel, in such circumstances, would have rightly incurred the curse.[1]

¶ Alluding to Mr. Hodgson, the defeated candidate, and how we should still keep an eye on him, I said that a gentleman saw a boy hitting another who was down, and remonstrated with him for hitting an antagonist who was down—to which the boy replied, "Ah, but you don't know how much trouble I had to get him down."[2]

¶ I know no nobler words, no loftier human standard, no more sublime ideal for the present juncture, than the masterpiece of literature with which Abraham Lincoln enriched the political library of the United States. The War of Secession was drawing to a close, and that great man, in whose character were combined the highest instincts of a true statesman and the tender-hearted generosity of a fervent Christian, had been for the second time elected to the presidential chair. In his Inaugural Address to Congress he spoke feelingly of both the Federal and the Confederate Forces. "Each looked," he said, "for an easier triumph. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. . . . The prayers of both could not be answered." And his message closed with these words: "With malice toward none: with charity for all: with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in: to bind up the nation's wounds: to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan: to do all that may achieve a just and lasting peace, among ourselves and with all nations."[3]

¶ A girl at school in France began to describe one of our regiments on parade to her French schoolmates, and as she went on, she told me, the recollection grew so vivid, she became so proud to be the countrywoman of such soldiers, and so sorry to be in another country, that her voice failed her and she burst into tears. I have never forgotten that girl, and I think she very nearly deserves a statue. To call her a young lady, with all its niminy associations, would be to offer her an insult. She may rest assured of one thing, although she never should marry a heroic general, never see any great or immediate result of her life, she will not have lived in vain for her native land.[4]

[1] Bishop A. F. W. Ingram.
[2] Sir Wilfrid Lawson, *Life*, 25.
[3] R. H. Hadden.
[4] R. L. Stevenson, *An Inland Voyage*.

iii. Patriotism was Religion.

1. Deborah identifies the cause of Israel with the cause of Israel's God. To be disloyal to the nation implied, to her thinking, religious treason. This identification of patriotism and religion belongs to an early phase of religious development, and is unquestionably associated with the crudest notions of the Deity, and of His relation to His worshippers. In disregarding the primitive notions, however, mankind has not parted with the old habit which they created. Even among the civilized Christian communities of the modern world the tendency to identify the apparent interests of the nation with the cause of God prevails. In time of deep patriotic emotion this would seem to be inevitable. For the religious instincts are then alert and active; men have been lifted above themselves; they are deliberately facing extraordinary demands on their self-control and power of self-sacrifice. Religion gathers into itself, unifies, exalts, and hallows all these highest sentiments of human nature. Patriotism, just in proportion to its sincerity and its strength, merges into religion. The words of Deborah are found to utter the very thoughts of Christian men, as they gird themselves for a desperate effort, and see their fellows flinch from the task. It is said that the famous Presbyterian divine, Stephen Marshall, preached no less than sixty times from this text. It is a curious evidence of the temper of men's minds at that period when the great civil war was on the verge of breaking out.

Political servitude was not the only effect of the Canaanitish power; the continuance of that power meant the predominance of the gods of the Canaanites and the perpetuation of coarse and debasing forms of nature-worship. Deborah and Barak, whatever their faults, stood for Jehovah, a spiritual Deity with a high morality. On Israel's freedom depended not merely her national existence and material prosperity, but the triumph of her purer faith.

2. Assuming the conception of human affairs as the scene of a true conflict between the will of God and oppugnant forces, how ought our conduct as patriotic citizens to be affected? Can we, as presumably in that primitive age Deborah and her con-

temporaries could do, simply accept the national interest, in the conventional and obvious sense of the phrase, as competent to interpret for us our religious duty? Is it enough to be consistently and enthusiastically an advocate for our own country at every point and on every occasion? Has religion fulfilled its function when it stimulates and exalts patriotism? We shall all agree that Christianity cannot be satisfied by these suggestions. The religion of Christ is not, in the old sense of the phrase, a national religion. Christ has commissioned no nation and no race to be, in any exceptional or exclusive sense, the historic guardian of His truth. "We must obey God rather than men" is a formula of essential Christianity; and God still speaks to us, as in the old prophetic age, most authoritatively and intelligibly from within ourselves. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

¶ We may be too ready to identify the political interests of the nation, as they appear to ourselves, with the cause of God. We are all naturally disposed to elevate our personal judgment in practical affairs into a standard of essential right, like George III., who confessed that "since he had no wish but the prosperity of his own dominions, he must look upon all who would not heartily assist him as bad men, as well as bad subjects." I need not point out that this attitude of mind is quite inconsistent with genuine tolerance: indeed, the reason why intolerance has been so frequently associated with religion is simply the fact that the identification of personal perceptions of truth and right with the cause of God is, within the religious sphere, eminently natural and, therefore, extremely frequent.[1]

¶ There is a famous passage in one of Edmund Burke's speeches —which are the classics of English political literature—which describes what in those days of corruption was a familiar phenomenon of public life, the decline of virtue in a politician. In a more general sense, we may borrow his words as true not of politicians only, but of us all, as we in turn pass into public life in one or other form of social activity: "I believe," he said, "the instances are exceedingly rare of men immediately passing over a clear, marked line of virtue into declared vice and corruption. There are a sort of middle tints and shades between the two extremes; there is something uncertain on the confines

[1] Canon Hensley Henson.

of the two empires which they first pass through, and which renders the change easy and imperceptible. There are even a sort of impositions so well contrived that, at the very time the path of rectitude is quitted for ever, men seem to be advancing into some higher and nobler road of public conduct."

A cause like ours is holy,
And it useth holy things;
While over the storm of a righteous strife,
May shine the angel's wings.

Where'er our duty leads us,
The grace of God is there,
And the lurid shrine of war may hold
The Eucharist of prayer.

iv. Religion is the Progress of the Kingdom.

1. It is Christ's spiritual kingdom against which Satan directs his fiercest assaults, and to which Christians owe their most devoted service. Devotion to Religion should be another name for devotedness to Christ. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"; —this is the motive and the blessing of all forms of work in the Church of God.

The great struggle of good and evil, of truth and error, which was raging when Deborah judged Israel rages still. The great laws of the moral world do not vary, however different, under different dispensations, may be the authoritative enunciation of truth, or the means of propagating and defending it. Jabin and Sisera never really die; Deborah is always despairing, triumphing, hoping, judging by turns. And the opportunities of generously serving Jesus Christ are few; perhaps not more than one in a lifetime. They come, they do not return. The day before Meroz failed there was no warning of the coming trial; the day after, there was no reversal of its moral doom.

¶ As I think over why it is that the curse of God comes down on the indifferent man in St. Pancras who does nothing and cares nothing, it is because there is standing among us One whom we see not, who cries as He cried in the very Gospel for this Sunday: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." The man who stands there in the

office, in the parish, in the workshop, and who does nothing, is an influence dead against the influence of Jesus Christ—an inert friend is counted an enemy. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." Those are His own words.[1]

Arise, my soul! nor dream the hours
Of life away;
Arise! and do thy being's work
While yet 'tis day.

The doer, not the dreamer, breaks
The baleful spell,
Which binds with iron bands the earth
On which we dwell.

Up, soul! or war, with fiery feet,
Will tread down men;
Up! or his bloody hands will reap
The earth again.

O dreamer, wake! your brother man
Is still a slave;
And thousands go heart-crushed this morn
Unto the grave.

The brow of wrong is laurel-crowned,
Not girt with shame:
And love and truth and right as yet
Are but a name.

From out time's urn your golden hours
Flow fast away:—
Then dreamer, up! and do life's work
While yet 'tis day.

2. To believe with all our hearts in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to believe that we ourselves have been commissioned to do His work in the world; we are surely called so to act in our several stations that they become serviceable in the interest of the world's redemption. We are to know, to understand, even to possess "the Mind of Christ"; and then to express that mind in the

[1] Bishop A. F. W. Ingram.

activities and relationships of life. In the language of Deborah, we are summoned "to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

(1) No one will question the duty of the Church in the evangelization of the world. The Church is bidden go into all the world and preach deliverance to the captives and the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound. It is the Lord's battle. It has the advantage of appealing to the heroic in men, of awaking their deepest sympathies, of commanding their best activities, of moving them to the greatest sacrifices. It is a warfare with error, superstition, cruelty, which is relentless, unending; and the cry to all who are Christ's, to all who look for the dawn of His day of peace, light, love, is to come up to the help of the Lord among the mighty.

(2) How small is the number of persons who will interest themselves in any work that requires a public spirit; for instance, in any municipal election on which so much depends! When some theological conviction or political question is to the front they will throw themselves into it; but when it comes to a matter of the real, quiet, Christlike work that is done by some of our men on County Councils, Boards of Guardians, and other bodies, how very few will give their sympathy and help to it!

(3) How many of the people among us who are in positions of influence in the various occupations feel any kind of responsibility for the elevation of their occupation, feel any desire to make it a stronghold against the power of evil? How many merchants feel that it belongs to them to elevate the standards of trade? How many teachers value their relation to the young because they have the chance to strengthen character against temptation? How many men and women in social life care to develop the higher uses of society, making it the bulwark and the educator of man's purer, finer, deeper life? Every occupation is capable of this profound treatment, besides its mere treatment as a means of livelihood or of personal advancement. In every occupation there are some men who conceive of it so. How few they are! The mass of men who trade and teach and live their social life never get beyond the merely selfish thought about it all. The lack of a sense of responsibility, the selfishness of life, is the great impression that is forced upon us constantly.

¶ As I look round London, I see a most tremendous battle eternally going on. I have got to know of late years more of the inner life of some of the great factories, warehouses, houses of business, than I knew five years ago; and I know that there is a battle in every one of those great houses such as sometimes we, who are outside of them, seldom suspect. Just imagine what that lad has to bear who hears the filthy talk about women from the men, perhaps the elder men, of the place, who ought to be setting him an example. It is only evidence from place after place which I am absolutely bound to believe that has shown me how strong the battle is, where men and lads are herded together day after day. I have known many a man who has had to stand a positive persecution; I know now some who are in a terribly hot part of the battle. And I can imagine the Captain who is watching it all, and sees the man, perhaps the foreman, perhaps the elder clerk, who, by his position, is the man to put down that kind of thing, skulking and doing nothing; and I can almost hear the curse of God ring over the man's head, "Curse ye Meroz, curse him because when my little lads are in their day of trial, he comes not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."[1]

(4) To how many Christians does the religious life present itself in the enthusiastic and inspiring aspect of working and fighting for God? Almost all Christians never get beyond the first thought of saving their own souls. There is nothing which so comes to impress a man as the way in which the vast majority of men hold back and, with no ill-will but all good wishes, let the interests of their fellow-men and of goodness and of God take care of themselves.

¶ There are people—plenty of people—who will work themselves into a state of white heat about religious education, but who will not teach in the Sunday Schools. There are people who will attend meetings where they will be inflamed by some theological firebrand, and cheer to the echo, but who will not themselves touch one of the burdens. They will not become managers of Board schools, and show by their presence and sympathy that they regard contact with little children as a blessed thing. They sit like Meroz in their snug drawing-rooms, and lament the sad fate of the children of London, but they do nothing to come in contact with them themselves. They will criticize their best friends, but they do nothing themselves.[2]

[1] Bishop A. F. W. Ingram.

[2] Prebendary Eyton.

3. Notice the phrase that is used: "the help of the Lord." Does God require help? Does the Lord require the help of feeble and fallible men? No. What does He need? Does He need our prayers? Does He need our services of praise? No. He needs nothing from any of His creatures, but He condescends to use our co-operation; and this rule is universal; it pervades the physical as well as the moral and intellectual kingdom. The earth does not yield its fruits or precious gems, or the mighty forces which lie hidden in its bosom, until man co-operates with the will of God to bring forth and organize the forces of Nature for his own use and purposes. So is it also in the moral and intellectual life. Man's faculties, intellectual and moral, are not developed, nor are the ills that afflict his bodily frame cured, without man's agency or without the human will co-operating with the will of God. So it is also in the case of politics, so it is in the action of nations. God does not need man's aid, yet He claims it.

The men of Meroz were not simply asked to help in freeing Israel from the yoke of Jabin, they were called to the help of the Lord, to take their stand among the strong and brave and true men who were fighting the Lord's battle. And that is true to-day of the Church of Jesus Christ—even when you have made as many admissions as those who are disposed to cavil at this claim demand shall be made. The Church of Jesus Christ stands for God's cause and purpose of grace in the world, and with its victory is bound up the highest well-being of mankind; in a word, the salvation of men. To deride the call of the Church is to despise the cause of God. "He that heareth you," said Jesus to the Seventy before He sent them forth as His heralds, "heareth me; and he that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me."

¶ "Oh, mother, I have just been in the garden helping God." "And what have you been doing to help God?" "Well, you see, I found a rose that was not quite blossomed, and I blossomed it."

II.

Some Reasons for the Sin of Meroz.

We do not know what was the reason why the inhabitants of Meroz committed that sin of omission which has made

their town a byword for ever. If they held a strategic point on the line of retreat and allowed the enemy to escape, they may have been cowardly or merely indolent. We cannot tell. But we can give reasons why men do not in our own day come to the help of the Lord.

1. One reason given is that *God does not really need help.* —The language of the text is poetical, figurative; it is not to be taken literally. God will do what He sees best, whether we help Him or not; He can conquer Sisera, at the proper time, without the aid of Meroz. Doubtless He can. But the question is, whether He wills to do so or not; whether, if He wills us to be His agents, we can wisely disobey Him by pleading that we have too much reverence or too much faith to obey. This kind of argument, it must be plain, leaves great room for self-delusion. Men will not argue thus who know by experience that they are likely to be, at least sometimes, swayed by selfish motives of indolence, or timidity, or self-aggrandizement. The faith in the self-propagating power of Christianity which is so strong that it will not support the cause of Christian missions; the robust faith in the indestructible vitality of the Church which, when occasion permits, would illustrate her life by depriving her of the agencies and resources that ordinarily support it; the faith, in short, in God's power of upholding His own cause in the world which carefully abstains from contributing anything to serve it, so fearful is it of offering a slight to the Divine Omnipotence; this faith, which would seem to be too vigorous to be in any sense practical, would not yet have been developed in the days of Deborah. It is hardly probable that Meroz declined its part in the great struggle from an excess of trust in the strength of Israel's cause and Israel's God; men had not then discovered that to obey God's will was to incur some risk of dishonouring His attributes.

> And evermore we sought the fight, but still
> Some pale enchantment clouded all our will,
> So that we faltered; even when the foe
> Lay, at our sudden onset, crushed and low,
> As a flame dies, so passed our wrath away—
> And fatal to us was the battle-day.[1]

[1] Margaret Sackville.

¶ When Christ will give gifts to St. Peter and the rest, He does not do what He easily could have done, make the fish leap into the boat without their labour and their nets; but He bids them go out into the deep and cast their nets—that is, exercise the accustomed handicraft which they had learned, and in which they were skilled. He teaches thus that He will not give without our work, and yet shows that it is not from our work, but from God's providing and blessing, that we obtain anything.[1]

2. Another reason is *false humility*.—Now, humility is good when it stimulates, it is bad when it paralyses the active powers of a man. It may do either. We have noble examples of humility as a stimulus; the sense of weakness making a man all the more ardent to use all the strength he has. But if conscious weakness causes a man to believe that it makes no difference whether he works or not, then his humility is his curse.

¶ Some priggish little clerk will say, "I have reason to congratulate myself that I am a civilized person, and not so bloodthirsty as the Mad Mullah." Somebody ought to say to him, "A really good man would be less bloodthirsty than the Mullah. But you are less bloodthirsty, not because you are more of a good man, but because you are a great deal less of a man. You are not bloodthirsty, not because you would spare your enemy, but because you would run away from him."[2]

3. Another reason is *fear*—simple cowardice.—A man is peace-loving, he says; but peace at any price is craven. Right ranks higher than peace, and often both cannot be had at once. Better one Luther who fights and makes mistakes, than a hundred like Erasmus, who make no mistakes or anything else. He who fears to offend the wicked needs more iron in his blood and more grace in his heart. On dress parade his garments may be faultless, but we save our hurrahs for the man who is stained and scarred by battles.

¶ Cowardice we call the most contemptible of vices. It is the one whose imputation we most indignantly resent. To be called a coward would make the blood boil in the veins of any of us. But the vice is wonderfully common. Nay, we often find ourselves wondering whether it is not universal, whether we are

[1] Luther. [2] G. K. Chesterton, *All Things Considered*.

not all cowards somewhere in our nature. Physical cowardice all of us do not have. Indeed, physical cowardice is rarer than we think. A war or a shipwreck always brings out our surprise when we see how many men there are that can march up to a battery, or stand and watch the water creep up the side of their ship to drown them, and never quail. But moral courage is another thing. To dare to do just what we know we ought to do, without being in the least hindered or disturbed by the presence of men who we know will either hate or despise or ridicule us for what we are doing—that is rare indeed.[1]

When all seems lost, and fate unkind
  Throws shadows deep around,
Be brave, and cast all grief behind,
  Be strong, and stand your ground;
Line up in front without a fear—
  Brace up, and face the blast;
Let others weaken in the rear—
  Be first, and not the last.

Your trouble, loss, or greatest grief
  May in your darkest day
Fill black despair with no relief,
  Find in the gloom no ray;
But struggle on, be brave and strong,
  And to the front look forth;
This world is not completely wrong—
  Press on, and test thy worth.

When trumpets call, line up in front;
  The struggle is for life;
Where danger lies, let nothing daunt
  Your courage in the strife;
Brave souls meet fate with smiling face;
  Be proud to die for right.
To fall in front is no disgrace,
  Care you how goes the fight?

4. Another reason is *indolence*—mere laziness.—Perhaps Meroz was not afraid. Perhaps she was not shy and self-distrustful. Perhaps she simply believed that the work of God would somehow get itself done without her, and so waited and waited and came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty. We are always giving elaborate and complicated accounts both of the

[1] Phillips Brooks.

virtues and of the vices of our fellow-men, which are really as simple and explicable as possible, as clear as daylight. A man does a good thing and we are not content to say that he does it because he is a good man, but must find strange obscure motives for it, some far-off policies and plans, some base root for this bright flower. Another man lets his duty, his clear duty, go undone, and again we set our ingenuity to work to guess why he does not do it. He misconceives his duty, he is too modest, he is waiting for something; when the real trouble is in a simple gross laziness, a mere self-indulgent indolence, which makes him quite indifferent to duty.

Thanks to a few clouds that show
  So white against the blue,
At last even I begin to know
  What I was born to do;

What else but here to lie
  And bask me in the sun?
Well pleased to see the sails go by
  In silence one by one;

Or lovingly, along the low
  Smooth shore no plough depraves,
To watch the long low lazy flow
  Of the luxurious waves.[1]

III.

The Curse.

i. Is it Unchristian?

1. "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof." The words are strong. Are we to say that the curse of Meroz is "a dark patch of human passion"; that Deborah, in the heat of her exultation and vengeance, was strictly incapable of a balanced moral judgment; that not to have taken part in the pursuit of Sisera was naturally a crime in the eyes of a passionate woman, eager for the emancipation of her race and for the triumph of her cause; but that it is altogether impossible to read history by the

[1] Robert Kelly Weeks.

light of such excited feelings, and to suppose that Meroz drew on itself, not merely the invective of Deborah, but also the displeasure and condemnation of a Righteous God?

No doubt, "Curse ye Meroz" is always out of place on the lips of fallible men; only supernatural direction could justify in point of reason what, perhaps, nothing could justify in point of charity —an anathema on opponents. When St. Paul, starting his missionary journeys, inaugurated, with whatever justification, the melancholy record of religious coercion by solemnly cursing his most conspicuous opponent, we are specially told that he was supernaturally directed, "*filled with the Holy Ghost.*" Such supernatural direction alone, indeed, could redeem the Apostle's action from injustice and unreason—injustice because he could not read his opponent's heart, or know his motives; unreason, for he could not easily reconcile such violence with "*the meekness and gentleness of Christ.*" It is certain, however, that we have no apparently supernatural direction in the affairs of life. None of us enjoys immunity from error, or monopoly of wisdom. Even if we can concede to an inspired Apostle the terrible privilege of anathema, we cannot decently claim it for ourselves.

2. Are we to say, then, that this language, though it may be in keeping with the stern spirit of the Law, is out of place in the religion of the Gospel? This, indeed, is often said. But it assumes too hastily that the Gospel repealed not merely the ceremonial but the moral teaching of the Law, not merely its forms of worship but its representation of the Divine attributes, not merely its carnal weapons of warfare but its loyalty to and zeal for truth. In point of fact, the Gospel explained or it enlarged the teaching of the Law. It removed misconceptions which had gathered round that teaching. It did not destroy what God Himself had given. God's earlier revelation of Himself as a whole, as well as its particular gifts and promises, was, in Apostolic phrase, "without repentance"; it did not admit of repudiation or recall. The Divine attribute of mercy, sufficiently revealed in and insisted on by the Law, acquired under the Gospel a practical and concrete shape in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The duties of charity, loving-kindness, patience, benevolence, unselfishness, already prescribed by the Law, were

elaborated and enforced with a new determination and precision in the Gospel. But the Gospel revelation did not thereby repeal the earlier revelation of the justice of God as a necessary principle of His government; nor did it define the virtue of charity to mean indifference on the subject of moral evil or of intellectual falsehood.

The advance which the New Testament makes upon the Old Testament morality consists largely in this, that the Old said, "Do not commit this or that open sin," while the New says, "Do not neglect this or that clear duty." The morality of the older revelation is typified by the Ten Commandments—nearly all negative: Thou shalt not make graven images, take God's name in vain, work on the Sabbath, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness. True, there are positive elements also; but in large measure the formulated ethical rules of the Old Testament are rules forbidding. It was natural that a Jew should ask, "What actual evil have I wrought in transgression of a Divine word that forbade it?" It was natural that the Pharisee, who exaggerated every evil tendency of Judaism, should be found exclaiming, "God, I thank thee that I am not an extortioner, nor a thief, nor an adulterer." But Christianity supplies another standard to the conscience. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." "What do ye more than others?" "He that abideth in me . . . the same beareth much fruit." And the penetrating judgment of Jesus is not satisfied on finding men guiltless of sinful acts. He separates the sheep from the goats on another principle. Those on the left are not accused of positive ill-deeds; they may have kept every one of the Ten Commandments from their youth up, but they have neglected the sick, the prisoner, the poor. "Inasmuch as ye did it not"—it is the curse of Meroz, the doom awaiting inactivity—"because they came not to the help of the Lord."[1]

¶ There are three places in the records of our Lord's words and deeds where the same truth finds emphasis. Look first at the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, the parable of the Talents, and see the curse pronounced by Jesus upon the inactive servant who had but the one talent and failed to use it. There is not a

[1] J. H. Rushbrooke.

line in the parable that suggests any infidelity or sin otherwise than that of inaction, and yet hear the Master's words, "Take therefore the talent from him. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Can you not hear in these words of Jesus the very curse of Meroz? Look again at Christ standing before the barren fig-tree. He looks to find the luscious fruit and finds none, and so He curses it and it withers away. Here again we find the curse against unfruitfulness and inactivity. Look once more. Our Lord has ascended; with a last leaning of His heart He bends from heaven to speak through St. John to the Churches. This is the last word of the Master to His Church, found in the Book of Revelation. Hear those words to Laodicea. She is not charged like Ephesus with cherishing heresy, nor like Pergamum with holding the doctrine of Balaam, nor like Thyatira with adultery and fornication, nor like Sardis with defiling her garments. None of these fearful sins is chronicled against Laodicea, and yet the bitterest curse of all is pronounced against her. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." What is this but the echoing of the curse of Meroz against lukewarmness, against inactivity, against the shirker and deserter from the battle of the Lord.[1]

3. The tone, no doubt, is not the tone of Christ. We will admit that about religion Deborah, the judge of Israel, had much still to learn. But one sometimes feels that it is fortunate there was a Deborah, that her imperfection has a value of its own. In the very ancient days, when life was simple, broad, and spontaneous, the passions of men had a vehemence and a plain-spokenness, their actions had a violence and a grand directness, which have been mitigated and confused by more reflective days. Our gentler ways are not *all* gain. Tales of our modern life and manners are not so impressive as tales of the ruder life. These deeds of patriarchs—an Abraham lifting the knife to slay his son, a Phineas cutting down unshrinkingly his idolatrous brethren—teach what they have to teach with incomparable vigour. These deeds, by their simplicity and grand excess, paint a truth of morals in strong, fierce colours which shine across the ages; they write the lesson as with a pen of steel that graves a rock; they dint it into the soul of man past forgetting.

[1] W. M. Smith.

ii. It is the Curse of God.

"Curse ye Meroz, *said the angel of the Lord.*" For we must not forget one remarkable characteristic of the Jewish theocracy: what we should term in a secular history its lofty public spirit, its superiority to all that is merely personal and selfish. David and other psalmists especially illustrate this. David reserves his enthusiasms for the friends of God; his aspirations for the success of the cause of God; his anxieties for the risks of God's Kingdom; his hatred for the enemies of God's truth and glory: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies." So Ezra: "Mine eyes run down with rivers of water, because they observe not thy law." So a captive in Babylon: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." The language of Deborah was not the expression of a personal, or social, or political spite any more than was the language of David and Ezra. It was not her own cause; not even the cause of her country, as such; it was the cause of the Lord God which she had at heart, which had long since won her love, and now fired and guided her indignation.

iii. And the Curse comes.

1. "Curse ye Meroz." The words still live. May they not be heard within the soul when a man has consciously declined that which conscience has recognized as plain duty? Such a man needs no audible voice of the Angel of the Lord or of the prophetess; conscience prophesies within him.

¶ Every failure of men or nations to fulfil their manifest duty involves by a law of the Divine government of the universe an appropriate punishment. So here. When we turn to Judges ii. 1–5 we see how God uttered such awful words of solemn warning as plunged the nation into penitent sorrow. Why was it? Because instead of rooting out the remaining Canaanites and destroying their altars they were content to make them tributary, consulting thus their ease and their pockets at the same time. They broke the covenant, and, instead of destroying the men and

the religious ideas so intimately associated with the land, they preserved them. It was indifference and cowardice from first to last. They had been warned of the result (see Num. xxxiii. 55). Now, I believe the failure of the men of Meroz brought specifically upon them the abiding curse on all negligence and disobedience. What that is is set forth in Judges ii. 1–5—viz. that the men and the idolatrous worship they permitted to remain in the land were as pricks in their eyes, thorns in their side to vex them in the land wherein they dwelt. In other words, the men and the ideas remained in their midst as moral stumbling-blocks or as some contagious disease whose virus would poison the blood of unborn generations to their complete undoing. For their failure the men of Meroz would experience the bitter entail of sin to the full. Their cup would run over with misery and woe. Israel's subsequent history illustrates the words even if we do not know the after history of Meroz.[1]

2. Neither nations nor individuals become reprobates all at once. The process of individual and national decay is usually, if not always, gradual. They go on from lost opportunity to lost opportunity till their fate at last is sealed, and the doom goes forth: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." But although judgment may tarry, it comes at last, and the sinner, whether an individual or a nation, never escapes the doom. Meroz did not escape it.

> Though the mills of God grind slowly,
> Yet they grind exceeding small.

They ground Meroz to powder so small that nothing remains to mark the spot whereon it stood.

¶ The curse meant something like that pronounced by Joshua upon the man who should rebuild Jericho—that he should lose all his children between the laying of the foundation and the setting-up of the gates. In one respect at least Deborah's malediction has not failed of its effect; her song has made the very name of this township a byword for ever. Meroz, for the Jewish people and for all students of the Bible, is a word that can never be mentioned without calling up associations of ignoble and cowardly inactivity. Yet the real curse of Meroz is far deeper; it consists

[1] W. Ll. Williams.

in the deterioration of character that comes to the man who ignores duty; it consists in the pitiable retrospect of a life that ought to have been filled with goodness, but has presented to God and man "nothing but leaves"; it consists in the self-condemnation and self-contempt which come in the hour when a man is forced to face his own soul and to know what he is![1]

Men think it is an awful sight
To see a soul just set adrift
On that drear voyage from whose night
The ominous shadows never lift;
But 'tis more awful to behold
A helpless infant newly born,
Whose little hands unconscious hold
The keys of darkness and of morn.

Mine held them once; I flung away
Those keys that might have open set
The golden sluices of the day,
But clutch the keys of darkness yet;
I hear the reapers singing go
Into God's harvest: I, that might
With them have chosen, here below
Grope shuddering at the gates of night.

O glorious Youth, that once wast mine!
O high Ideal! all in vain
Ye enter at this ruined shrine
Whence worship ne'er shall rise again;
The bat and owl inhabit here,
The snake nests in the altar-stone,
The sacred vessels moulder near,
The image of the God is gone.[2]

3. The curse of Meroz is the curse of uselessness; and the sources out of which it comes have already been named—cowardice and false humility and indolence. They are the stones piled upon the sepulchres of vigour and energy and work for God, whose crushing weight cannot be computed. Who shall roll away those stones? Nothing can do it but the power of Christ. The manhood that is touched by Him rises into life. When a man has understood the life and cross of Jesus, and really knows that he is redeemed and saved, his soul leaps up in love and wants to serve

[1] J. H. Rushbrooke. [2] Lowell.

its Saviour; and then he is afraid of nobody; and however little his own strength may be, he wants to give it all; and the cords of his self-indulgence snap like cobwebs. Then he enters the new life of usefulness. And what a change it is! To be working with God, however humbly; to have part in that service which suns and stars, which angels and archangels, which strong and patient and holy men and women in all times have done; to be, in some small corner of the field, stout and brave and at last triumphant in our fight with lust and cruelty and falsehood, with want or woe or ignorance, with unbelief and scorn, with any of the enemies of God; to be distinctly on God's side, though the weight of the work we do may be utterly inappreciable,—what a change it is when a poor, selfish, cowardly, fastidious, idle, human creature comes to this! Blessed is he that cometh to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. There is no curse for him. No wounds that he may receive while he is fighting on that side can harm him. To fight there is itself to conquer, even though the victory comes through pain and death, as it came to Him under whom we fight, the Captain of our Salvation, Jesus Christ.

Unconscious Loss.

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Unconscious Loss

And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times, and shake myself. But he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.—Judg. xvi. 20.

Let us look at the text in two ways, first as it applies to Samson, and second as it applies to the Christian.

I.

Samson's Loss.

"The Lord was departed from him."

So God had once been there. His Spirit had dwelt in Samson's heart, and in no small measure. But now God had left Samson. Well, what difference did it make to him? We must look at Samson before and after.

i. Before.

1. *His consecration.*—Samson enjoyed a singular privilege, accorded only to one other person in the Old Testament. His birth was foretold to his parents by an angel. Isaac was promised to Abraham and Sarah by angels whom they entertained unawares; but, save Isaac, Samson was the only one whose birth was foretold by an angelic messenger before the opening of the Gospel dispensation. Before his birth he was dedicated to God, and set apart as a Nazirite. Now, a Nazirite was a person who was entirely consecrated to God, and in token of his consecration he drank no wine, and allowed his hair to grow, untouched by a razor. Samson was entirely consecrated to God, and when any saw him, they would say, "That man is God's man, a Nazirite, set apart." Thus Samson grew up in the belief that he was consecrated to God, that there was a definite, divinely appointed work for him to do, and that God would endow him for that work

with all the necessary strength. As he grew up, we are told, "The Lord blessed him, and the spirit of the Lord began to move him in the camp of Dan."

¶ To consecrate one's life is not necessarily to alter the daily round of duty, but it must fill everything—recreation as well as work—with a new spirit. And the "spirit" in which a thing is done makes all the difference between a great and a small action. A room may be swept or scrubbed because it is a necessary part of the day's work; or the commonplace task may be turned into a high and glorious privilege, if the heart is thrilled with the wonderful remembrance that Christ is the Royal Guest for whom the room is being prepared.[1]

2. *The heroic in him.*—What was it that made Samson strong? It was this: He refused to accept the low, degraded religious standard with which his contemporaries were content. The Israelites still believed that they were the chosen people of God, but there was a glaring inconsistency between what they professed to believe and the real condition in which they were. Called to freedom, God's people they were; emancipated by the power of Joshua, working the will of Almighty God, they were yet in a despicable servitude to the Philistines; they were content—for the human mind is strangely constructed—they were quite content with that state of things. It did not appear to them any great inconsistency that the people of the Lord, who were in the land which flowed with milk and honey, with all the bright and glorious promises of utter quiet and entire freedom, should yet be the craven slaves of a people with lower morals and grosser religion. Samson refused to ratify the inconsistency that he saw. To him nothing short of harmony between the promise of God and the fact of his people's freedom would be satisfying. His conviction was a real and an adequate one; it was this—and he held it firmly—that the dominion of God was absolute and irresistible, that the promises of God were true and everlastingly faithful. Without doubt the temptation came to him to accept things as they were, and not to rise to the higher level of truth and integrity; but he cast it from him, and, doing so, became the man of his age, the hero of his race, and the vindicator of God's truth at that era of the world.

[1] Dora Farncombe, *The Vision of His Face*, 81.

The other Judges were backed by the people: the movement for freedom began with them individually, but the mass of the people rose at their call. But Samson, throughout, fought the Philistines single-handed. He despised their whole collected armies, went down alone into their strongest cities, and when they would shut him in, carried away gates and bars in the grim satiric mood that was his fighting humour; and that was the nearest approach to seriousness the presence of armed enemies could induce. Samson was qualified by his natural gifts thus to stand alone and to hearten the people and give them more courageous and hopeful thoughts. It was not more his great physical strength than the blithe and daring manner in which he used it that impressed the people and solaced the weaker men who could not imitate him. His name, Samson, refers not to his strength, but to his temper. It means "Sunny." This was what the people saw in him—an inexhaustible joyousness of disposition that buoyed him up in danger and difficulty, and made him seem to the down-trodden people, whose future was clouded and gloomy, as the sun rising upon and cheering them. This joyousness came out in the lightheartedness with which he fought against countless odds; in his taste for witty sayings and riddles; and in the gigantic practical jokes he perpetrated in carrying off the gates of Gaza, and in tying the foxes tail to tail, and sending them through the standing corn with burning brands.

¶ Where consecration is, there will be the realization of God's presence. We may rely upon it that where one resolutely sets God before the soul as the object of desire, adoration, and obedience, there God will become a living reality. He will reveal Himself without doubt to such, and His presence will come to surround the soul. And there will be joy. That is to say, the sure fruit of consecration, like the fruit of the Spirit, is joy. We do not always regard the matter in this light. We are disposed to speak of the *duty* of consecration—the duty of setting apart substance or self to the use and service of God; and it is a duty, the rightful claim of God upon us. What we are apt to forget is that Duty where it is discharged always comes to wear the robes of gladness and is apparelled in celestial light. That is especially true of our duty to God. In keeping His commandments there is great reward.[1]

[1] Charles Brown, in *Youth and Life*, 202.

And it was not only without the help of the people but in spite of them that Samson had to deliver the land. The Israelites, instead of flocking to Samson's standard and seconding his effort to throw off the Philistine yoke, bound him and gave him into the hands of the Philistines, complaining bitterly that he had brought them into trouble with their masters, and willing to buy peace at the price of Samson's life—just as the Pharisees said of our Lord: "If we let him thus alone, the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation"; and subsequently gave Him up bound to the Romans. They would not strike a blow in defence of their own liberty, still less in defence of their champion. These 3000 men of Judah, armed and equipped, stood by as idle spectators whilst Samson burst the bonds they had bound upon him, and, snatching up the only weapon he could see, the jawbone of an ass, fell upon the common enemy, and slaughtered as many as did not flee.

Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes,—they were souls that stood alone,
While the men they agonised for hurled the contumelious stone,
Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith divine,
By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's supreme design.[1]

ii. After.

1. "The Lord was departed from him." Why? There were two causes—an inward and an outward; and, as always, the outward was subordinate to the inward and depended upon it.

(1) *The inward cause.*—It is true that the evolution of moral life in history bids us apply a different standard of judgment to the lives of the heroes of the old-time faith from that which we apply to those of the new. Yet it does not require the neglect or reversal of this principle to see that the life of Samson fell very far short of the moral possibilities of his day and race.

"For I have been a Nazirite unto God from my mother's womb." A Nazirite!—and what manner of man was he? He was a separated and consecrated man; for this was the law of the

[1] Lowell.

Nazirite—"He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink; he shall be holy. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord." The vow of the Nazirite was essentially a vow to abstain from fleshly lusts. He was to hold himself pure as God's instrument; he was not to yield his members unto evil; he was to nurture his life in Spartan severity and simplicity; he was to attain self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, and from that discipline his whole body and soul were to derive strength.

Without any disparagement to the character of Samson, one may fairly say that his keeping of the Nazirite vow had all along been marked by adherence that was letter-perfect rather than spiritually faithful. He had been temperate in the direction of his vow.

> Desire of wine and all delicious drinks,
> Which many a famous warrior overturns,
> He could repress; nor did the dancing ruby
> Sparkling, outpoured, the flavour or the smell,
> Or taste that cheers the hearts of gods and men,
> Allure him from the cool crystalline stream.

But in that direction only. In others he had been weak.

The Nazirite vow, rightly understood, was a divinely-given basis for moral development, a prophecy through outer separateness of spiritual consecration. Nor could any man be said to have drunk of its spirit who rested in the details of ritual, and did not seek to penetrate to its essence—consecration to God. The consecration of the Scriptures is never a mere separating from something; it is also a separating to something, a shutting-up of a man to God. What poverty of meaning must have been assigned to the words "separate unto the Lord," "holy unto the Lord," when they could be supposed to be fulfilled by a life admitting of the sensual irregularity of this Hebrew chief!

It was here surely that the seeds of defection were sown—in the poor external conception of holiness belonging to the time, above which Samson, although one of the heroes of faith enumerated in the Epistle to the Hebrews, never rose. But at length that defection reached the outward life. And here let us remember that charity bids us think that only a strong and vital

spirit of obedience could sustain the burdensome restrictions which the national code laid on the pious Hebrew, and especially upon the Nazirite; so that, however little intelligent grasp of the further purport of the vow there was in Samson's life, there was in the faithful literal observance of it some evidence, conscious as he was of the Divine commission given him, that he was more than a mere ritualist.

(2) *The outward cause.*—When the inner life of honest service was weakened, even the outer conformity to the Divine condition laid upon Samson was not maintained. The thing that seemed within his power, that seemed most easy—to maintain the secret of his God-given strength—proved beyond him, and the strong man was ensnared by wiles that would not have caught a child.

¶ It seemed to be a trifle whether a man's hair was to be permitted to grow, or was cut off. In itself it was a trifle—infinitely unimportant. But it was not a trifle in the light of its associations. Samson knew that it was no trifle: he had no mind to betray to Delilah what he knew to be the secret of his strength. Behind the commonest acts in life, it often happens, there cluster infinite issues; a whole moral world may be at stake: heaven or hell may await us behind a deed done, a word spoken, a consent or a refusal,—and these petty acts at once become momentous; their importance is measured by their results. What could matter less in itself than whether a man was or was not circumcised? "Neither circumcision availeth anything," said the Apostle, "nor uncircumcision." But let circumstances change: let it be maintained by a powerful school in Galatia that no Christian can do without circumcision, and the meaning of the act changes too: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing" (Gal. v. 2).[1]

2. And what was the result? His yielding meant an immediate *loss of power.* Could it matter, one might think, whether the head of the Hebrew judge were adorned with locks that hung to his broad shoulders, or were closely shorn? His strength surely lay in his mighty sinew and muscle. But this is just the naturalistic reasoning that misses the Divine element of the Hebrew history. The great thing about the Divine ordination of Samson's life was just that obedience to God

[1] H. P. Liddon.

had been made to hinge upon a detail. The detail is nothing, the principle is everything. It is the incidental expression of eternal reality; the small link that preserves, or, severed, breaks the chain of obedience that keeps man in communion with God. Keep it intact, and there is for every emergency the unceasing inflow of the Divine power; break it, disregard the small, apparently insignificant point which God in your inner life has made the condition of His being with you, and the power flies. It flies insensibly as the perishing of the perfume from a dead flower, to be succeeded in time by the odour of corruption. So it flew quietly, swiftly from Samson. "And he woke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times, and shake myself. But he wist not that the Lord was departed from him."

He knew his loss only when the strain came. His enemies were without. They flew upon him, and he, confident with the confidence of fifty past victories, bent his mighty limbs for the fray. But the power was gone. Ramath-Lehi was not to be repeated then. The strength that had made one man a terror to a band had gone. Flaccid and powerless, he sank a pitiable prey to the ground. "And the Philistines laid hold on him, and put out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-house."

¶ The constant message of every poet, prophet, and seer, of every leader and guide of Hebrew history, is that only as God dwells in the nation can the nation be great. The chosen race go into the wilderness a mere band of fugitive slaves; they become a great nation because God is with them. They go out to battle against mighty enemies, and a little one puts to flight a thousand, because God marches with the host; they go to battle without God and the process is reversed—they go out one way and flee seven ways. Prophets like Elijah defy kings like Ahab; men untrained to arms like Gideon put trained armies to flight; Elisha, lonely and forgotten, counts those who be with him more than those who be with his foes, because he sees the chariots and horsemen of God moving in the clouds; David, the shepherd boy, is stronger than Goliath; Daniel, in his purity and piety, is more than a match for the tyrannous king who holds him in his power; and the simple explanation of every such triumph is that God is with these heroes of faith and action. We may say, if we will, that the heroism of those men was but the reflex action of their

faith; it does not alter the facts. Something made them great, some power moving in and through them, which begot faith, and courage and high ideals, and noblest heroism. "The Lord was with them," is the explanation afforded us in Scripture. He was with them of their own consent, working through their own obedience and consecration. They were His vehicles, His instruments, the media of Divine manifestations. And if they had withdrawn from God, or if God had withdrawn from them, then had they been as other men; they would have awakened as Samson did, to know their strength departed and the fountains of their virtue dry.[1]

How infinite and sweet, Thou everywhere
And all-abounding Love, Thy service is!
Thou liest an ocean round my world of care,
My petty every-day; and fresh and fair
Pour Thy strong tides through all my crevices,
Until the silence ripples into prayer.

That Thy full glory may abound, increase,
And so Thy likeness shall be formed in me,
I pray; the answer is not rest or peace,
But charges, duties, wants, anxieties,
Till there seems room for everything but Thee,
And never time for anything but these.

And I should fear, but lo! amid the press,
The whirl and hum and pressure of the day,
I hear Thy garment's sweep, Thy seamless dress,
And close beside my work and weariness
Discern Thy gracious form, not far away,
But very near, O Lord, to help and bless.

The busy fingers fly, the eyes may see
Only the glancing needle which they hold,
But all my life is blossoming inwardly,
And every breath is like a litany,
While through each labour, like a thread of gold,
Is woven the sweet consciousness of Thee![2]

[1] W. J. Dawson. [2] Sarah Chauncey Woolsey.

II.

The Christian's Loss.

Samson as consecrated is a type of every Christian. But we may take the text in two ways, first, as it refers to the Christian who has lost touch with God—the backslider—"The Lord was departed from him"; second, as it refers to the Christian who has been anointed by the Holy Ghost and has received power for special service, and has afterwards lost this power. Of him Samson is more clearly the type.

i. The Backslider.

1. What is backsliding? It is a falling from grace. But let us look at it psychologically. The man has been "born again," and the new-born soul is feeling its way along a course absolutely new to itself. It faces a trackless area, and everything is strange. Under these conditions of inexperience, evil meets the new life in countless guises. It often comes suddenly with no time for deliberation. It comes, many times, at an inopportune moment, when the new life is not at its strongest. That life is surprised and taken off its guard. It does not take in the gravity of the situation. The seriousness of the consequences is not comprehended, and the yielding is often almost imperceptible. Yet, notwithstanding all palliating conditions, the yielding is sin. Darkness again suffuses the soul; condemnation spreads its gloom over consciousness, and sin, once getting a foothold, however slight and brief at first, in the regenerated heart, brings back the old tendencies which, prior to regeneration, have dominated the psychical being.

The consequence is that there takes place in consciousness an oscillation between victory and defeat. Now the new life is victorious; and now the old tendencies conquer. But such psychical fluctuations, from the very nature of the psychical structure, cannot be perpetual. Resilience gradually and imperceptibly grows less. The movement now swings positively in one of two ways. Weary of vacillation, disheartened by repeated failure, vanquished by continuous defeats, the heart may swing completely back into the old grooves of action. The rebound from sin then ceases; the recoil from condemnation

ends. The life then remains under the domination of sin; in common terminology, it is "backslidden."[1]

¶ In the life of Coillard of the Zambesi we read that all the sons of Moshesh were converted but that subsequently all lapsed. The following is a conversation between M. Coillard and Molapo.

When reminded of his conversion:—"Yes," he said, "I was awakened, exercised beyond the power of words to express. I have experienced in my own heart, with unspeakable delight, the sweetness of Jesus. But to-day you see I have sunk into sin, and I am always sinking deeper and deeper."

"Poor man; and can you do nothing to escape?"

"*Moruti*, a man like you ought to know what the Apostle says: 'It is *impossible* to renew them again unto repentance.' So to-day, you see, if I listen to the Word of God, it is only with the ears of the head; my heart, no, that hears them no more. I like the preaching (*thuto*); I like you. I shall do my best to build a school-house and a church. I do not like a place where the name of God is never heard. But that is all. It is all over with me. Ah, Monare, if you knew the power of that anguish which once laid hold of me, if only that could be renewed, do you see, it would cost me nothing either to send my wives away or to come and talk to you about my soul."

"I tried to exhort him in God's name, but no mark of emotion or even of real seriousness betrayed itself in his own face. It is terrible to taste of the living, the true, and to return like the sow to her wallowing in the mire."[2]

But, ah! not yet is peace complete,
The foemen, fiercer for defeat,
Strive to regain their ancient seat.

The world, forsaken, brings again
Its joys and cares: the Will would fain
Its realm recover and retain.

And though that Light still shineth clear
Through those new shades, and though the ear
Hears still that Voice it loves to hear

Speak, as of old, on Galilee,
"Peace": yet, withal, the heart must see,
And hate its own infirmity:

[1] H. E. Warner, *The Psychology of the Christian Life*, 127.
[2] *Coillard of the Zambesi*, 70.

And cries, as one who cries for breath,
Worn and oppressed, "I faint beneath
The alien body of this death!"

'Tis well, for, otherwise than so,
The soul, disdaining to lie low,
A deeper depth of ill might know.

A darker gloom, a gulf more wide,
Because a self-exalting pride
Would thrust her further from His side.[1]

2. Backsliding may be *unconscious*. Samson "wist not" that the Lord was departed from him. There are always people like Samson in the world. They imagine that grace once given stays, and that they must still be in the safe channel. They are not conscious of any deliberate break with the Church and faith of their fathers, and so they take these for granted as still there. People can very easily bring themselves to believe that what they once were they still are, especially if there has been no swerve or outburst of misconduct to mark the change that has been going on. And yet a change has been, in many cases, passing over their life. Associations and practices which once they would have scrupulously avoided are now admitted upon the score of business, or of legitimate pleasure, or of a larger knowledge of the world. The depreciation goes on unsuspected.

¶ The Scripture speaks of individuals who have left their first love, while many of the characteristics of a religious profession continue to be maintained—backsliders in heart, who hang on as useless encumbrances to a church from which their affections are estranged. In Ephesus, although they had left their first love—in Sardis, where the graces languished and were ready to die—in Laodicea, where a lethargic lukewarmness had dulled away the energy of devotion—there was the maintenance of outward decorousness and the continuance in the fellowship of saints. And in our churches now, it is to be feared, there are numbers who realize the terrible description of the prophet, that "grey hairs are upon them"—premonitions of mortality, signs of weakness and of age—"and they know it not."[2]

3. "The Philistines be upon thee." The degradation of character may go on quite unconsciously, and it is only when some

[1] S. J. Stone, *Poems and Hymns*, 103. [2] W. M. Punshon.

crisis arises in a man's life that he becomes aware that his moral strength has departed from him.

¶ I remember a great elm tree, the pride of an avenue in the south, that had spread its branches for more years than the oldest man could count, and stood leafy and green. Not until a winter storm came one night and laid it low with a crash did anybody suspect what everybody saw in the morning—that the heart was eaten out of it, and nothing left but a shell of bark.[1]

4. It is difficult to make an estimate of ourselves by poking into our own sentiments and supposed feelings and convictions, and the estimate is likely to be wrong. There is a better way than that. Two things tell what a man is—one, what he wants, and the other, what he does. As the will is, the man is. Where do the currents of your desires set? If you watch their flow, you may be pretty sure whether your religious life is an ebbing or a rising tide. The other way to ascertain what we are is rigidly to examine and judge what we do. "Let us search and try our *ways*, and turn again to the Lord." Actions are the true test of a man. Conduct is the best illumination of character, especially in regard to ourselves.

¶ M. Coillard had all his life the greatest horror of religious fictions; and of emotion, which ought to be a spiritual force, evaporating in mere sentiment. With him, as with Mabille, to see a truth was to put it in practice. Hence he says: "Our project of extending the Mission to Banyailand . . . was the one theme of our conversation as we rode back. One day Major Malan, Mabille, and I were crossing the river Key, and climbing the slopes, when, in obedience to an irresistible impulse, we all three sprang from our horses, knelt in the shadow of a bush . . . and, taking each other as witness, we offered ourselves individually to the Lord for the new Mission—an act of deep solemnity which made us all brothers in arms. Immediately we remounted, Major Malan waved his hat, spurred his horse, and galloped up the hill, calling out 'Three soldiers ready to conquer Africa.' Mabille and I said, '. . . by God's grace we will be true till death.' And we meant it. That marked a new era in our life, and was, in so far as we were concerned, the true origin of the Barotsi Mission."[2]

[1] A. Maclaren.

[2] *Coillard of the Zambesi*, 217.

ii. The Anointed.

God chooses and anoints men for special work, and He bestows upon them the Spirit in large measure as an equipment for their work. What do we mean when we say that "the Lord is departed from them"? We do not necessarily mean that they have lost complete touch with God, but that they have lost their large spiritual endowment. They have failed to realize the highest—that of which they were capable—and they have lost power.

¶ Power, that is the great practical matter for us men, once our faces are set towards the light; and in the life in Christ the way of power is marked out. Everywhere, all over the world, in its darkest places, as a man follows the light he sees, the power comes, and more light comes, and power grows anew, Divine power flowing in upon him and through him, whether he knows it or not. But in the Christian faith we are given an open vision of the way of power, as well as of the light and truth of men; open-eyed we may yield to Christ being made Man in us—the Christ who ever comes to enlarge the realm of His incarnation; and we may possess and wield His power as our own, reason giving consent, heart warmed by the vision and the presence of Him who reigns. In this, too, Christianity stands at the centre of things, and fulfils and completes them all.[1]

1. *The anointed and their varying gifts.*—God does not give the same gifts to all men, nor does He give them in the same measure. To Samson He gave physical strength, to Saul kingly power, to Balaam the power of prophecy. And each was answerable only for his own gift, and in the measure in which he had received the gift. And the greater the gift and opportunity, the greater the failure.

When there is something rotten in the state of a Church; when a nation's politics are based on false principles; when the social relations between high and low, rich and poor, landlord and tenant, master and servant, are at fault; then, from the midst of a down-trodden, silently suffering community God raises up a man. He raised up equally for Israel a Samuel and a Saul. But of Saul we read that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from him."

[1] W. Scott Palmer.

But the gift may be different from these. We put these from us. They do not concern us. But the gifts are very varied. Let us take one as an example which we do not generally regard in that light—the gift of prayer.

If we steadily make use of this capacity, small as it may be; if we make a rule of keeping sacred a portion of our time, and endeavour with all our might to press upward to God, He will bless the efforts we are making; the door will open as we knock, and we shall experience day by day a greater aptitude for thinking of heavenly things; we shall become more and more conscious of the Spirit of God helping our infirmities. On the other hand, if we despise the one talent which God has given us; if, because we find it difficult to pray, because we are conscious how poor and worthless our prayers are, therefore we give up the habit of prayer, or content ourselves with simply repeating the words of prayer, without any effort to rise to its meaning; if we despair of ever being able to pray in spirit and in truth, then the end will be that we shall lose that capacity which we had refused to make use of.

¶ Darwin has been criticized for allowing his taste for music and letters to be starved away in his devotion to science; but it is a question whether he would have made the discovery of evolution without it. Sir James Paget has been blamed for his indifference to social reform, indeed to all politics; but he was probably right when he said that a man did more good if he kept to his own business, doing that with all his soul, and not dissipating his energies in directions outside his own particular range; that every cobbler should stick to his last; and that, by obedience to that rule, the affairs of the world at large would come straight. And doubtless Sir E. Burne-Jones was chided for keeping so much to himself; but he rightly looked upon an artist as a dedicated man, with as real a responsibility to discharge as any other. "What do we want to be wrenched from our work for?" he would say in reply to those who would tempt him away; "I should like to stop in this room for 439 years, and never be taken out of it." Everyone, indeed, if he is to develop as God intended him, must stick to the narrow path, whether it lead to a Nazareth or a London. Even the Son of Man confessed to being narrowed till His baptism was accomplished.[1]

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 75.

"O World-God, give me wealth!" the Egyptian cried.
His prayer was granted. High as heaven, behold
Palace and Pyramid; the brimming tide
Of lavish Nile washed all his land with gold.
Armies of slaves toiled ant-wise at his feet,
World-circling traffic roared through mart and street,
His priests were gods, his spice-balmed kings enshrined
Set death at naught in rock-ribbed charnels deep.
Seek Pharaoh's race to-day, and ye shall find
Rust and the moth, silence and dusty sleep.

"O World-God, give me beauty!" cried the Greek.
His prayer was granted. All the earth became
Plastic and vocal to his sense; each peak,
Each grove, each stream, quick with Promethean flame,
Peopled the world with imaged grace and light.
The lyre was his, and his the breathing might
Of the immortal marble, his the play
Of diamond-pointed thought and golden tongue.
Go seek the sunshine-race, ye find to-day
A broken column and a lute unstrung.

"O World-God, give me power!" the Roman cried.
His prayer was granted. The vast world was chained
A captive to the chariot of his pride.
The blood of myriad provinces was drained
To feed that fierce, insatiable red heart;
Invulnerably bulwarked every part
With serried legions, and with close-meshed Code;
Within, the burrowing worm had gnawed its home.
A roofless ruin stands where once abode
The imperial race of everlasting Rome.

"O Godhead, give me Truth!" the Hebrew cried.
His prayer was granted; he became the slave
Of the Idea, a pilgrim far and wide,
Cursed, hated, spurned, and scourged with none to save.
The Pharaohs knew him, and when Greece beheld,
His wisdom wore the hoary crown of Eld.
Beauty he hath forsworn, and wealth and power.
Seek him to-day, and find in every land
No fire consumes him, neither floods devour;
Immortal through the lamp within his hand.[1]

[1] Emma Lazarus.

2. This brings us to our second point — the *loss of the gift.*—Samson lost his God-given power. But is it for that that we generally pity him? No. We give our sympathy to Samson because in the midst of his days he fell overcome by treachery, because the cruelty of enemies afflicted him.

(1) The loss may be *unconscious.* Samson "wist not." It is so in the physical world. The man who has been accustomed to active and even strenuous exertion settles down to a life in which there is slight opportunity for the practice of his favourite pursuits, but in which there is constant tension exercised on muscle, nerve, and brain. He is unconscious of the extent to which the process is affecting him. But some day a necessity arises for putting forth unwonted exertion, and he finds to his astonishment that he is unequal to the task. Silently, like the wearing away of the rock by rain and storm, like the rounding of the sea pebble by the ripple of the water, his strength has been worn away; and, until the moment arises for putting it forth, he wist not that it had departed from him.

It is so in mental things. The freshness of intellectual vigour seems preserved to some men long beyond the wonted span of working years; but a time comes to the strongest when the climax of power has been reached and passed, when the old freshness of delight in new aspects of familiar things no longer exists, when the mind settles on the few certainties and deserts the speculative view of the world, when there is lacking the power to approach new subjects of investigation, or to undertake new tasks of practical life; when the mind turns back upon experience, and lives by the retrospect. And though at such a time some may still continue to delude themselves that their mental vigour is unabated, nature lifts up its testimony against the delusion, and declares, in the lost flexibility, in the absence of initiative and administrative power, in the failing memory, that the strength of the man has departed, though he wist it not.

So is it in the spiritual world. There is a loss that is more deadly than the loss of physical vigour, sadder than the decay of mental power. It is the weakening of the soul by almost imperceptible decline; the experience that issues in spiritual paralysis.

And because we know we have breath in our mouth and think we have thought in our head,
We shall assume that we are alive, whereas we are really dead.

The Lamp of our Youth will be utterly out: but we shall subsist on the smell of it!
And whatever we do, we shall fold our hands and suck our gums and think well of it,
Yes, we shall be perfectly pleased with our work, and that is the perfectest Hell of it![1]

(2) The Christian realizes his loss only when the moment of need comes, when he hears the words "the Philistines be upon thee."

A Christian may be in a society where the tone is agreeably worldly. And he finds it a little hard to maintain the distinctness of the Christian life. It is pleasant to him to stand well with his unconverted friends. And the temptation springs up in his heart to conform. It comes in the subtle form of presenting to his friends a Christianity void of all that even the world may call narrowness or fanaticism. He hopes that by mingling as far as possible with those who are undecided, in their recreations and the pursuits that may be common, he may gain an influence over them that may be used for God; but it leads himself to compromises, until the process of levelling down has gone so far that the distinctive attitude of the Christian life has gone. Now, just so far as this has taken place, a man's influence with others is killed. All the while that he was fondly imagining he was presenting to his friends the type of a Christianity shorn of all acerbities and angularities, his power over them has been quietly slipping away. And the awakening to this consciousness is an unpleasant experience. Some one of his careless, light-hearted acquaintances has become more serious—the breath of God's Spirit where it listeth has awakened a new longing in his soul; and his life, so self-centred, so agreeably undisturbed before, has become to him poor and miserable without Christ. He wants direction; he wants communion; he wants to hear the man speak who can tell the reality of these things to his own heart. And to whom does he resort?—to the Christian who has lost his Christian savour and become worldly?

[1] Rudyard Kipling.

No; but to the man about whom his Christianity is the most distinctive thing, who has not been engaged in minimizing this difference between himself and the world, and paring down the dimensions of that, but who has longed—and has got some part of that for which he longed—to be "transformed by the renewing of his mind." Why, thinks the Christian who has lost his influence, did my friend not come to me?

3. *A note of hope.*—He that has vowed his strength to God, he that has received some grace from God, some godliness of feeling and aim, and yet yields—it may be to some wretched lust—and loses his power, and is left helpless, ashamed, miserable, has his power perished absolutely? Think of Samson—for there is no better instance of the use which God can make of an ill-spent life. He could never be the man he was; but there in his prison-house he saw the ruinous folly he had been guilty of, saw his betrayal of the trust God had reposed in him, saw that out of the best material for a life of glory that any man of that period had received he had wrought for himself a life of shame and a degrading end. His heart was broken; the strong man was crushed, and had, like the weakest sinner, to cry to God, to seek that last comfort which abides when all others are gone, and which more than makes up for the loss of all others—to seek that light, the light of God's own presence, which restores brightness to the most darkened life, which does not refuse to shine on the most benighted soul. And what he sought, he found. Slowly his hair grew, and with it slowly returned his strength; as health comes slowly back to the man who has been shattered by disease or accident; as spiritual vigour slowly returns to him who by one rash act has let his soul be trodden in the dust. And so Samson made restitution, and he said, "Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

The Lion, he prowleth far and near,
  Nor swerves for pain or rue;
He heedeth nought of sloth nor fear,
  He prowleth—prowleth through

The silent glade and the weary street,
In the empty dark and the full noon heat;
And a little Lamb with aching Feet—
He prowleth too.

The Lion croucheth alert, apart—
With patience doth he woo;
He waiteth long by the shuttered heart,
And the Lamb—He waiteth too.
Up the lurid passes of dreams that kill,
Through the twisting maze of the great Untrue,
The Lion followeth the fainting will—
And the Lamb—He followeth too.

From the thickets dim of the hidden way
Where the debts of Hell accrue,
The Lion leapeth upon his prey:
But the Lamb—He leapeth too.
Ah! loose the leash of the sins that damn,
Mark Devil and God as goals,
In the panting love of a famished Lamb,
Gone mad with the need of souls.

The Lion, he strayeth near and far;
What heights hath he left untrod?
He crawleth nigh to the purest star,
On the trail of the saints of God.
And throughout the darkness of things unclean,
In the depths where the sin-ghouls brood,
There prowleth ever with yearning mien—
A lamb as white as Blood.[1]

[1] Ruth Temple Lindsay, *The Hunters*.

A Woman's Choice.

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A Woman's Choice.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.—Ruth i. 16, 17.

1. At what period the events narrated in the Book of Ruth occurred we are not expressly told. All we are told is that it was "in the days when the judges judged" (chap. i. 1). But as Israel was under the Judges for nearly five centuries—as long, let us say, as from the accession of the Plantagenet Henry v. to the present day—the phrase does not go far towards dating the Book. But another phrase in it (chap. iv. 21, 22), from which we learn that Boaz was the great-grandfather of David, makes it pretty certain that the Judge in whose days Ruth the alien was admitted to the Commonwealth of Israel was the venerable but most unhappy Eli. Ruth's son was Jesse's father; Jesse was the father of David. It is very probable, therefore, that, when he was a child, Ruth may have fondled Jesse in her arms.

¶ As a fragment of early literary work, the Book of Ruth stands alone; it is certainly a curious and unexpected "find" in the annals of Israel. Take it as we may, it remains unproved and unexplained—a gem of literature so rare as to be priceless. The very genius of simple narration is in this Hebrew tale; and around it a gentle *glamourie* floats in which—

> All puts on a gentle hue,
> Hanging in the shadowy air
> Like a picture rich and rare;
> It is a climate where, they say,
> The night is more beloved than day.

The book has an office in the Bible not unlike that which God has given to the flowers in the world of nature; it softens, it

sweetens, it soothes. And as God has greatly cared for His flowers, so He has greatly cared for this book. Its Maker has made it very beautiful.[1]

¶ A recent *Congregationalist* quotes the following from the *Saturday Evening Post* as the sentiment of Senator Beveridge: "The Bible has something for everybody. If you are a politician, or even a statesman, no matter how shrewd you are, you can read with profit, several times a year, the career of David, the cleverest politician and one of the greatest statesmen who ever lived. If you are a business man, the Proverbs of Solomon will tone you up like mountain air. If you are a woman, read Ruth. A man of practical life, a great man, but purely a man of the world, once said to me: 'If I could enact one statute for all the women of America, it would be that each of them should read the Book of Ruth once a month.'"[2]

2. The Book of Ruth is the story of Ruth the Moabitess. Now in the whole gallery of Scripture portraits there are few which are more familiar to us, or more attractive, than the sweet figure of "Ruth standing amid the alien corn." Nor is it the least of her attractions to the Christian heart that the blood of Ruth ran in the veins of Jesus of Nazareth. In his genealogy of our Lord, St. Matthew inscribes the names of only four women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba; and among these four, Ruth easily holds the pre-eminence. Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were all women of dubious virtue, even when judged by the standards of antiquity; but, judged by the moral standard of any age, Ruth is not only pure and sweet as the fields in which she gleaned, she rises to an heroic pitch of unselfish devotion and love.

3. Than the scene depicted in the first chapter there is hardly any more beautiful and affecting in the whole range of Old Testament Scriptures. All three actors in it are admirable, and are admirably portrayed. Even Orpah shows a love and devotion which command our respect, although her love did not rise to the full heroic pitch; while of Ruth and Naomi it is hard to say which is the more admirable—Naomi, in putting from her her sole comfort and stay, or Ruth, in leaving all that she had in order to become the stay and comfort of Naomi's declining years. The exquisite and pathetic beauty of the scene has been recognized

[1] Armstrong Black. [2] A. Lewis.

from of old, and has inspired painter after painter, musician after musician; while Ruth's famous reply to Naomi's dissuasive entreaties takes high rank among the sentences which the world will not willingly let die.

¶ It was a voice of the night which said, "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law"—a long-drawn-out complaint flung after Orpah in vain, and echoing back its own unanswered monotone to Ruth as, amidst "shadows numberless," she stood alone by Naomi; but it awakened a morning song, the first of the dawn of the better day in which it was to be known how much God loved the world—a song that was sung while it was yet dark, as Ruth's soul rose on the wing until the unrisen Sun of God's own love shone on her face; a song in which notes that escaped from heaven and God are mingled with hers; a song the words of which one can scarcely read for fear of doing wrong to their own plaintive melody.[1]

4. And yet, in this contest of self-sacrificing love, it is hard to tell whether the palm should be awarded to Ruth or to Naomi. Has not Naomi discharged her full duty of dissuasion in placing the discomforts and dangers of her lot before her daughter? She, at all events, thinks that she has not. When Orpah has kissed her and gone back, while Ruth is still "cleaving" to her, she renews her entreaties and dissuasions. "Thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people, *and to her gods;* go thou also. It is not simply, or mainly, that we belong to different races; we worship different gods. It is *this* that really separates us, and makes it impossible that you should find an asylum in Judah. Return, then, after thy sister." When we consider how dark and solitary Naomi's path must have been had Ruth yielded to her entreaties, we cannot but feel that these two noble women were well matched, that it is hard to say in which of them love was the more generous and self-forgetting.

¶ If, in the judgment of the world, Ruth carries off the palm, it is, in part, because we expect more of a mother in Israel than of a daughter of Moab; but it is still more, I think, in virtue of the exquisite and pathetic words in which her reply to the dissuasions of Naomi is couched. Her vow has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that not because of the beauty

[1] A. Lewis.

of its form simply—though even in our English Version it sounds like a sweet and noble music—but because it expresses, in a worthy form and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love. It is the spirit which informs and breathes through these melodious words that makes them so precious to us, and that also renders it impossible to utter any fitting comment on them. They shine most purely in their own light. "Intreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." One wonders where the woman found breath to utter such words as these as she lay weeping on Naomi's breast, and that her voice did not break into inarticulate sobs and sighs under the weight of so impassioned a tenderness.[1]

Our subject is a woman's choice. We may consider—

I. How she made it.

II. What it was.

I.

How Ruth made her Choice.

Ruth chose to cast in her lot with Naomi out of the love she had for Naomi herself. But that was not all. Orpah also loved Naomi. There was evidently more than human affection in the choice which Ruth made; there was love Divine. She knew and loved Naomi; she also knew and loved Naomi's God. And there was a third element. There was decision of the will. Under the emotion of love to Naomi, under the constraint of love for Naomi's God, Ruth made choice, and it was a deliberate act of the will.

¶ One may say, How came Ruth to know who was the God of Naomi? I answer: As God said of Abraham, I know that Abraham will instruct his children; so may one confidently say of Naomi: I know that Naomi had catechized and instructed her daughter-in-law, and often taught her that the God of the Israelites was the onely true God, who made Heaven and Earth, and that all others were but Idols, the workes of men's hands. Yet as the Samaritans beleeved our Saviour first upon the relation of the woman that came from the Well, but afterwards said unto her, John iv. 42, "Now we beleeve, not because of thy saying; for

[1] S. Cox.

we have heard him our selves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." So happily Ruth was induced first to the liking of the God of Israel, upon the credit of Naomies words, but afterwards her love of him proceeded from a more certaine ground, the motions of God's holy Spirit in her heart.[1]

1. *Her affection for Naomi.*—The words of the text speak to us of rare devotion, of unwavering decision. "As an expression," says one writer, "of the tenderest and most faithful friendship, they are unrivalled." "The words in which the resolve is uttered," says another, "constitute the most determined, the most decisive, the most unhesitating confession of love, in all literature." "It may be doubted," writes a third, "whether in all the crowded records of womanly heroism and self-sacrifice we anywhere meet a courage and devotion surpassing this." This is high praise, and yet we feel it is not too high, for this one utterance would set Ruth on a pedestal by herself, making her worthy to stand near the front rank of that great company of witnesses whose words and example have proved an inspiration to succeeding generations.

Ruth's attachment to her mother-in-law opens up the possibilities of human love: the might of a true and noble attachment: that love to the individual which may overcome the more general love even to relatives, friends, and country. It is an illustration of the power that one heart may have upon another. Think of it; it is one of those things that add glory and solemnity to human life. This personality of Naomi's was everything that a human personality could be to Ruth. Ruth knew that if Naomi had never come to her land her life would have been a very different life—in its thoughts, purposes, and realizations—from what it was now.

¶ Whilst I was making preparations for my journey, Kachi Ram entered the tent. He looked frightened and perplexed. "What are you doing, sir?" inquired he hurriedly. "The doctor says you are going to leave alone to-night, cross the mountain range, and go to Lhassa by yourself."

"Yes, that is true."

"Oh, sir! the perils and dangers are too great; you cannot go."

"I know, but I am going to try."

"Oh, sir! then I will come with you."

[1] Thomas Fuller.

"No, Kachi, you will suffer too much—go back to your father and mother now that you have the opportunity."

"No, sir, where you go, I will go. Small men never suffer. If they do, it does not matter. Only great men's sufferings are worth noticing. If you suffer, I will suffer. I will come."[1]

In this world's strange vanishing show,
The one truth is Loving. O sister, the dark cloud that veils
All life lets this rift through to glorify future and past.
"Love ever—love only—love faithfully—love to the last."

2. *Her love to God.*—Naomi knew the true God. When the cold, senseless, dumb, dead idols of Moab could do nothing for a young, bursting, sobbing, breaking heart, then old Naomi would come near with the faith of Israel, and with her prayer to the God of Israel. And what she knew of God she had been careful to teach her sons and her sons' wives. And now all that is rushing through Ruth's blood and pulsing in her veins, as she stands at the turn of the road and says, "I cannot leave old Naomi. At the thought of parting with her this flashes in upon me. She is more than life, and meat, and drink, and wealth, and everything to me. To be with her is life, and to part from her is darkness, and misery, and death."

Do we not find here a venture of faith, as great a venture, indeed, in its own way, as that of Abraham when he went forth, not knowing whither he went? Ruth had listened to Naomi's words of warning—that hardship and persecution and privation awaited them: they would be going among a people who did not take kindly to foreigners and treated them as aliens; and while no doubt they would be a comfort to their mother-in-law, yet they would mar their own future. "Go," said Naomi to her daughters-in-law, "return each of you to her mother's house: and the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have done with the dead, and with me." Ruth heard those arguments and warnings, and this is her answer: "Intreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee." What are bonds and imprisonment to a soul of this heroic mould? "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." There is a gulf of centuries between those words of St. Paul and the

[1] A. H. Savage Landor, *In the Forbidden Land.*

words of Ruth, but they vibrate with the same emotion, the same passion pulsates in both.

What we here read teaches that God not only knows human sorrow, but can transmit through a human heart something of His own power to alleviate and heal. Ruth's love was in this one instance to do what His own was in the fulness of the time to do universally in Jesus Christ: she was to give rest to one who was weary and heavy-laden. This Gentile woman at one step came across the boundaries of life into its glorious liberty, when she so loved and made sacrifice; on her altar there was Christian flame before the time, and her love was that of the daughters of God. They who can be to any lonely and ailing heart what Ruth was to Naomi have the Divine within them; they are making some spot of our world a part of the new earth under the new heavens; they are in their measure wielding the power by which God Himself makes all things new. Love of such quality as Ruth's never faileth: it is of unconquerable strength. Like hers, all love will overcome when it is reinforced by the Divine, and when it says not only "Thy people my people," but also "Thy God my God." But that it may retain its virtue and possess the power of an endless life, it must be continually renewed and purified in the love of God.

¶ We have, perhaps, been accustomed to think of faith as taking the precedence of love—I mean in point of time. I will not say that that does not represent the fact in any sense at all. But I do say that the converse is distinctly true, namely, that faith follows love, and makes its presence known as it could not do if love were wanting. The more we dwell upon it, the more clearly shall we see that St. Peter was right when he said, "*Above all things* have fervent love among yourselves," for the simple reason that *it* cannot stand alone, that in its train will follow all other qualities which adorn and make life beautiful.

"Love"
Is a short word that says so very much!
It says that you confide in me.[1]

¶ Ruth shows how instantly and entirely she adopts Naomi's religion by sealing her vow with the Hebrew oath and by calling on the God of the Hebrews: "*Jehovah* do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

[1] J. Flew, *Studies in Browning*, 140.

3. *Her decision.*—Ruth's resolution to join the Lord's people was the result of deliberate resolve. To quote old Bishop Hall: "She must evidently have been a proselyte, converted to the faith of Israel prior to the utterance of these words, or else, surely, she would never have been so determined in her language." If Ruth had been persuaded to take the step of joining Israel, and if her coming as far as she did had been the result of outward pressure brought to bear upon her, depend upon it she would have gone back when Naomi presented before her eyes all that she would have to bear, and what her profession would entail.

¶ Here we have the resolution of Ruth portrayed in lively Colours; so that if we consider her Sex, a Woman; her Nation, a Moabite; one may boldly pronounce of her what our Saviour did of the Centurion, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."[1]

¶ Love is the thoughtful outgoing of one's whole nature to another. It is really an act of the will, though most times unconsciously so. It belongs distinctly to the realm of choice. It is not essentially an emotion merely, though it sweeps all the emotional power of a man as the whirlwind sweeps down the valley. It is not of the heart primarily, though it absolutely controls the heart. It is wholly in itself a matter of choice. The will gathers up all the information at hand, and displays it skilfully before the heart until it is enraptured and completely swept along as the will meant it should be.

> When a soul, by choice and conscience, doth
> Throw out her full force on another soul,
> The conscience and the concentration both
> Make mere life, Love. For Life in perfect whole
> And aim consummated, is Love in sooth,
> As nature's magnet-heat rounds pole with pole.

It was not an easy choice. If we would understand the scene, especially the stress laid on these young widows finding new husbands, we must remember that in the East of antiquity, as in many Eastern lands to this day, the position of an unmarried woman, whether maid or widow, was a very unhappy and perilous one. Only in the house of a husband could a woman be sure of respect and protection. Hence the Hebrews spoke of the husband's house as a woman's *menuchah*, or "rest"—her secure

[1] Thomas Fuller.

and happy asylum from servitude, neglect, licence. It was such an "asylum" of honour and freedom that Naomi desired for Orpah and Ruth. But, as she had to explain to them, such an "asylum," while it might be open to them in Moab, would be fast closed against them in Judah. In marrying them her sons had sinned against the Hebrew law. That sin was not likely to be repeated by Israelites living in their own land. Yet how is Naomi to tell them of this fatal separation between the two races? How is she to make these loving women aware that, if they carry out their resolve to go with her, they must resign all hope of honour and regard?

Three things were involved in the act of will by which Ruth made her choice. We may call them docility, detachment, and determination.

(1) *Docility.*—Docility is a desire and readiness to learn. The first words of Saul of Tarsus after his vision exactly express this frame of mind: "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts xxii. 10). Certainly this feature was present also in the case of Ruth; this readiness to learn from others, and to give due place to the effect of the influence under which she had been brought. She, who had learnt so much from Naomi, felt that she could not cut herself off from the opportunity of learning more. And this is so important for us all. Though it is hard, though it humbles us and makes us feel our ignorance; yet it is all bound up with a converted heart. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children." We must be teachable—ready to learn—and this in many different ways—*e.g.*, under the hand of God, recognizing (what we are so apt to miss) the true meaning of things in our own life, when seen in their relation to His providence. Or, again, under the influence of others with whom we have to do; not, of course, in a sense which would be weakness, surrendering ourselves to every influence in turn, or easily led by any one who may seek to gain a hold upon us, but a readiness to be taught by others, as against an obstinate persistence in thinking that we always know best, and have nothing left to learn. And, once more, under the voice of conscience, learning to recognize the harm which we do to ourselves by all our little resistances to its voice, and the risk which we run thereby of silencing it altogether.

(2) *Detachment.*—What a tremendous strain this crisis put on her! Her home, with all its associations; her religion, which had been no heathenism to her, but rather her idea of truth; and then Orpah, the one person whose experiences had been most like her own, to whom, therefore, she must have been bound by ties of the closest sympathy—she had to detach herself from all these in her great act of choice; and this may well come home, in its degree, to us. How strong are the ties of old associations, old ideas, old sympathies, and friendships! And yet at times we may find that it is just these things which may be holding us back from making a right choice, in simple faithfulness to our conscience and to God. Then we shall learn the cost of true conversion, and the need that we have of that detachment from all else but Him which enables us to say, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest" (Matt. viii. 19).

(3) *Determination.*—"Naomi saw that Ruth was stedfastly minded." And it was no less than the plain truth, as her whole after-life declared. Ruth went as far as she knew how when she said: "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." St. Paul lifts our assurance to a higher point: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 38, 39).

All heaven is blazing yet
  With the meridian sun:
Make haste, unshadowing sun, make haste to set;
  O lifeless life, have done.
I choose what once I chose;
  What once I willed, I will;
Only the heart its own bereavement knows;
  O clamorous heart, lie still.

That which I chose, I choose;
  That which I willed, I will;
That which I once refused, I still refuse:
  O hope deferred, be still.
That which I chose and choose
  And will is Jesus' Will:

He hath not lost his life who seems to lose:
O hope deferred, hope still.[1]

II.

What the Choice was.

Ruth herself tells us what her choice was. The way which Naomi went was to be her way; and Naomi's abode her abode; Naomi's people were to be her people; and Naomi's God her God; where Naomi died she would die, and there would she be buried. The enumeration may not be complete; it may not name all that the Christian choice involves; but it is full of instruction.

1. "Whither thou goest, I will go." It was a brave thing to say. She had never been in the land of Israel: she knew nothing of its nature. For aught she could tell, it might be such a change, after the land of Moab, that it would be hard to live there. "Whither thou goest, I will go. I care not whether thou turnest to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west. All points of the compass are alike to me, for the loadstone of grace has touched my heart; and, so long as I go where the Lord and His people are, it matters little to me whether I turn to the right hand or to the left." The soul that really makes a true profession of Christ will know how to keep by the footsteps of the flock.

¶ These two widowed women travelled across Moab to Israel —two lonely women who were all in all to each other. "Who is this that goeth up through the wilderness, leaning upon the arm of her beloved?" What a picture of Christ and His people— Naomi and Ruth travelling together from Moab to Bethlehem in the Land of Promise. So with us. Since we have seen Christ the world has changed to us, and, thank God, we do not care for it. Since we have seen Christ, and have become enamoured of Him, we can let the world go by, for—

Ah, the Master is so fair!
His smile so sweet on banished men,
That they who meet Him unaware,
Can never rest on earth again.

[1] C. G. Rossetti.

And they who see Him risen afar,
On God's right hand, to welcome them,
Forgetful stand of home and land,
Desiring fair Jerusalem.

2. "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." She made no conditions. She did not say, "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge, if it is a nice large house. Where thou lodgest I will lodge, if there is luxurious accommodation." Ruth's soul despised fencing her resolve with mean conditions. "Where thou lodgest I will lodge, whether it be in a barn, in a shed, in a cottage, in a palace, or in the open air."

¶ A good Companion, saith the Latine Proverb, is *pro viatico*; I may adde also *pro diversorio*: Ruth, so be it she may enjoy Naomies gracious companie, will be content with any Lodging, though happily it may be no better than Jacob had, Gen. xxviii. 11. And yet we see how some have been discouraged even from the company of our Saviour, for feare of hard lodging; witnesse the Scribe, to whom when our Saviour said, "The foxes have their holes, and the Fowles of the ayre have nests, but the Sonne of man hath not where to lay his head": This cold comfort perfectly quencht his forward zeale, and he never appeared afterward; whereas he ought to have said to our Saviour as Ruth to Naomi, "Where thou lodgest will I lodge."[1]

3. "Thy people shall by my people." "Thy people!" they were the very people she had been taught from her infancy to despise and hate. Ruth had learned to curse them. Likely enough, either her brothers or her cousins had gone to war with Israel; for we know that Moab dreadfully tried and perplexed the people of Israel. And yet here is Ruth throwing in her lot with a people that hitherto she had looked down upon, and whom, up to the present, her family had opposed. There are closer ties than the ties of nationality, or even of blood.

¶ Haman being offended with Mordecai, as if it had been but leane and weak revenge to spit his spight upon one person, hated all the Jewes for Mordecai's sake: the mad Beare stung with one Bee, would needs throw downe the whole Hive. But cleane contrarie, Naomi had so graciously demeaned her selfe, that Ruth for her sake is fallen in love with all the Jewes.[1]

[1] Thomas Fuller.

¶ The sentiment enthusiastically responded to by the human instincts of a Roman audience, even in Rome's most corrupt days, has yet to be extended and applied by Christian England to international interests. We are a nation, and nothing that concerns other nations do we deem foreign to us. Through good and evil report to this principle we must firmly adhere, if we would have our claim of "teaching the nations how to live" held for more than an idle boast. It is not enough that we have established, and are resolute to further and maintain, our own freedom and nationality. Our wishes and endeavours must tend to secure the same blessings for other countries. As no man will reach heaven who seeks to reach it alone, so no nation will ever develop the highest and most enduring forms of national life, while it is contented to remain the passive and uninterested spectator of the onward and upward struggles of kindred peoples. A recluse tribe is as anomalous as a single anchorite.[1]

There are two good thoughts here.

(1) The influence of true friendship does not end with the friend: the love drawn forth is not confined to the one who draws it forth. Every true and ennobling love that is kindled within us, while it finds its focus in the friend that kindled it, casts a warm glow over all those who are associated with that friend. I have loved a nation for the sake of one man in the nation. I have loved to look at the son of a great man whom I have honoured and loved; I have loved to look at the house where he lived; the paths which he walked, the books that he wrote, everything that appertained to him became more sacred to me for the love I bore him. A great, loving personality draws out our love not only towards himself, but towards his people.

(2) Those who are striving to serve the Lord should cling to those who are the disciples of the same Master. The law of dependence, as it acts upon this world of human beings, and resolves itself into other laws of influence and sympathy, is found in all the relations of man. In itself it is a beautiful thing, this leaning of one upon another, this clasping of hand with hand in the great circle of human brotherhood, and feeling the electric spark, as the touch of a single finger sends a thrill through the multitude.

In every pause
Of labour, when the labourer looked upon

[1] C. W. Stubbs, *God and the People*, 113.

His fellow, such endearing sympathy,
Such union in discipleship shone through
The lovely lattice of his loving soul,
That each exchange of glances seemed a swift
And mutual sacrament.[1]

4. "And thy God my God." Ruth was not content to be a secret idolater in the Lord's land, as too many are. She might have gone with Naomi, and been introduced into the Israelitish society, and yet all the while, in the secret shrine of her heart, have been worshipping her old gods.

Again there are two thoughts here.

(1) There are some people in the world who are called "Christian"—and we do not doubt their Christianity, we only call into question their consistency—who would drive us away from God, if we had not this Book and God's own Spirit to guide us. There is a piety abroad that is repellent; and if we had no other light than the light which their example gives, we would say, "Give us any God rather than theirs." There are others who, as they charm us by their spirit of meekness and gentleness, of truth and of grace, as well as by their strength and courage, make us exclaim, "Oh, that their God may be our God!" Judson the missionary died; other missionaries laboured after him; but those who knew Judson did not want to hear of any other God than Judson's God. That is to be a living epistle, known and read of all men.

(2) Love between man and man, parent and child, or between husband and wife, can reach its highest and fullest attainment only when cemented by love to God. It may not be absolutely wrong for a man to marry an unbeliever, but we have known many homes unhappy through lack of agreement on religious subjects. To be sure, all so-called Christian homes are not happy, but, other things being equal, the husband and wife whose love is centred on something great and noble above and outside of themselves will love each other more, and live more happily together. It is a principle of psychology, as well as a fact of human experience, that the highest friendship is formed not by the love two persons have for each other, but in the common love both have for something else. And what greater else can there

[1] Anna Bunston, *The Porch of Paradise*, 25.

be than religion? It is religion that makes our earthly friendships eternal; love, which is the soul of friendship, is the fruit of religion. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; for every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." God did not come between Naomi and Ruth as a barrier to separate them, but as a spiritual power to bind them more closely together. Their friendship reached its perfection only when Ruth said: "Thy God shall be my God."

¶ Philip Henry's advice to his children regarding marriage was, "Please God, and please yourselves, and you will please me"; his usual compliment to his newly married friends: "Others wish you all happiness. I wish you all holiness, and then there will be no doubt but you will enjoy all happiness."

5. "Where thou diest, will I die." So Ruth had no thought of returning. She had no idea of simply going to inspect the land of Israel, and then returning to her own. "Where thou diest *I* will die"; or, in other words, Ruth made a life-gift of herself to the people.

Love loves for ever,
And finds a sort of joy in pain,
And gives with nought to take again,
And loves too well to end in vain:
Is the gain small then?
Love laughs at "never,"
Outlives our life, exceeds the span
Appointed to mere mortal man:
All which love is and does and can
Is all in all then.[1]

¶ I shall tell you the story of a daughter who dearly loved her father and stuck by him to the end. Her name was Margaret Roper, and her father was Sir Thomas More. When he was imprisoned, she loved him the more for his misfortunes. When he lay in the Tower under sentence of death, his chief comfort was the visits and letters of Margaret, and the night before his execution he wrote her a letter with a bit of charcoal saying, "I have never liked your manner better than when you kissed me last night (before the guard of soldiers), for I am most pleased when daughterly love has no leisure to look to worldly courtesy."

[1] C. G. Rossetti.

¶ Two or three years ago, in a book by Professor Stearns, an American theologian of great promise, who, to the loss and regret of the universal Church, was carried away in his prime immediately after the publication of this book, I came across a phrase which struck me much at the time and has dwelt in my memory ever since. It was "permanent choice." I never had heard that phrase before, and I never had reflected on the thing very much until I found it designated by that happy phrase. Now what do you think permanent choice may mean? You know how will is always at work every day. To get up in the morning is an act of will, and it is not always a very easy one. In dressing there are many acts of will, and in taking breakfast, and so on, all through the day. But most acts of will must be about trivial things and be soon forgotten. There are other acts of will that cannot be forgotten. Their effects are permanent, and they imply hundreds of thousands of other acts of will which are, so to speak, involved in them. I think it was of these that Professor Stearns spoke, but there is something else in this remarkable phrase. I think he meant that the will in a permanent choice stands to this choice, approving it, believing in it, glorying in it, and never wishing to change it.[1]

Oh, surely, love is higher, deeper,
Than human smile and human speech;
So high, so deep, the angel-reaper
Cannot reach.

6. "And there will I be buried." This is not a useless addition to the resolution to die with Naomi. To be buried in the sepulchre of some family is to be recognized as of the family kinship. There is no other recognition that is so hard to obtain or so difficult to lose. When she said, "And there will I be buried," Ruth threw in her lot with Naomi and Naomi's people fully and finally. To offer to be buried with Naomi's kinsfolk was the last and most whole-hearted act of surrender.

¶ The ancients were wonderfully devoted to the sepulchres of their fathers. I confess that I should not have been much surprised if Ruth had said, "Well, Naomi, I am willing to live in your country, and I am willing to die there; but, after I have breathed my last, would it be asking too much to request that my bones be sent back to the sepulchre of my father and mother in the land of Moab?" Yes, she would have said that, if she had

[1] Professor James Stalker.

not been the Ruth that she was; but, altogether consecrated, she would not even have her bones go back into her old country. No, dead as well as living, she would have fellowship with the Lord's people.[1]

¶ A certain beadle had fancied the manse housemaid, but was at a loss for an opportunity to declare himself. One day—a Sunday—when his duties were ended, he looked sheepish, and said, "Mary, wad ye tak a turn, Mary?" He led her to the churchyard, and pointing with his finger, got out, "My fowk lie there, Mary; wad ye like to lie there?"[2]

[1] A. G. Brown.

[2] Dean Ramsay, *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character*, 305.

A Greeting in Harvest.

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A Greeting in Harvest.

And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-lehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee. —Ruth ii. 4.

1. The greeting took place at Bethlehem. There are two towns of that name mentioned in the Old Testament. This is Bethlehem of Judah. It is situated about six miles south and west of Jerusalem, on a ridge which rises to a height of 2550 feet above sea-level, and falls away in terraced slopes on all sides, the descent to the north and east being specially steep. The terraces, as they sweep in graceful curves round the ridge from top to bottom, give to the little town the appearance of an amphitheatre, and serve to make to the approaching traveller a picture which closer acquaintance does not wholly disappoint.[1]

¶ Bethlehem is still "the house of bread," as its name means, and the way to Bethlehem is still through fields of barley in April as it was in the days of Boaz. A quarter of a mile below the town, on the slope of the hill, the traditional site of the threshing-floor of the great Hebrew farmer is pointed out to the visitor; and its authenticity is exceedingly probable, for it is just in the place where the Bible narrative prepares you to look for it. We read in the advice which Ruth's mother-in-law gave to her that she said of Boaz, "Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee *down* to the threshing-floor." Now threshing-floors are always in the same field where the corn or barley is reaped; for all the threshing and winnowing processes in the East, owing to the fineness of the weather, are done in the open air; and they are always in the highest part of the field which is most exposed to the wind, so that in winnowing the chaff may be blown away from the grain. You might therefore have expected that Naomi would ask her daughter-in-law to go *up* to the threshing-floor. But her words are true to the local peculi-

[1] T. Nicol. in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, i. 195.

arities, which are different from those of other places. The town of Bethlehem covered the whole top of the hilly ridge on which it was built. It occupied the highest ground in the country, so that any place round about was lower than itself; consequently there was no room for a threshing-floor on the heights where it would naturally be situated. The threshing-floor of Boaz, like his farm, had to be formed at a lower level, in some such declivity as the traditional spot. Ruth had therefore to go down to it, as the sacred narrative tells us; and this little coincidence confirms in a most interesting and unexpected manner the local accuracy of the Bible writer, and shows that he must have written, not from imagination, but from having lived on the spot, and thus having been familiar with its peculiar features.[1]

2. It was the time of barley harvest. It was a beautiful April day, and the barley-fields of Boaz below the town of Bethlehem—this crop being always the first to ripen in Palestine as in our own country—were lying golden under the blue cloudless sky, and the reapers had begun with their sickles to cut it down. It was a picturesque sight, full of colour and animation; the light blue and red dresses of the women—which are exactly the same now as in the days of Ruth—contrasting with the yellow grain and glowing with intense vividness in the brilliant sunshine. It was a scene that an artist would have loved to paint; as indeed it has often been painted, for who does not remember some artistic representations of "Ruth among the alien corn"?

She stood breast high amid the corn
Clasp'd by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won.

On her cheek an autumn flush,
Deeply ripen'd;—such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.

Round her eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veil'd a light,
That had else been all too bright.

[1] Hugh Macmillan.

And her hat, with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim;—
Thus she stood amid the stooks,
Praising God with sweetest looks:—

Sure, I said, Heav'n did not mean,
Where I reap thou shouldst but glean,
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.[1]

¶ Perhaps nothing links us more closely with generations that are past and with races long departed than the yearly operations of the harvest. Social customs are varied in many lands and differ widely among distinct nations. Society frames one set of rules for its protection in this country and another in that, and so diverse are these conventionalities that what would be the strictest etiquette in one land would sometimes be the grossest outrage in another. It is hard for us, with our modern ideas and western modes of thought, to enter into the spirit of many social and domestic customs of the Egypt of the Pharaohs, or even the Rome of the Cæsars. We even find it hard, unless we dwell long among them, to understand the ways of our continental neighbours to-day. But when we come to consider the operations of the harvest in almost any land or any age, we seem to stand on familiar ground. Change and variety show themselves here also, it is true. Machinery has made a vast revolution in our methods of agriculture. The primitive practices of former years would only produce a smile of contempt if employed in England to-day. But for all that we are on familiar ground when we read the story of the harvests of other days. In the main, the operations of to-day are the same as those of generations long fallen asleep. The same ploughing and harrowing, the same sowing and reaping, the same threshing and winnowing, the same process repeated again and again as years roll on, link us with all lands and all ages in a bond of brotherhood. The Saviour's parables of the cornfields might almost have been uttered by Him without change of language in our own cornfields to-day. The grain of wheat found in the wrappings of the mummy brings us more closely into touch with the Egypt of olden times than the mummy itself. The harvest-field seems to be the meeting-point, the common ground, of all civilized races and all generations. Elsewhere they may be divided; but in gathering their bread men are one.

[1] Thomas Hood.

Even so is it when men are brought into relationship with Him who, as a corn of wheat, fell into the ground and died, that He might produce the harvest of world-wide salvation. The Bread of Life is the common need of man, and in gathering that Bread, in seeking and following that one Saviour, men are ever drawn more closely to each other. Apart from Him they may be separated, scattered, divided, hostile; in Him they become brethren; they are "all one in Christ Jesus."

3. The intercourse of Boaz with his reapers shows us that the relations between them were not commercial but patriarchal. He took a warm interest in themselves and their doings, and they in turn were kindly affectioned towards him. He not only supervised the work of his servants, but gave them assistance in it. He partook of the same food with them, and quenched his thirst from the vessels which the young men had drawn for common use. It was no niggardly hand that dispensed the provisions of the harvest-folk; and an injunction was given to the reapers to allow the poor strange gleaner to glean even among the sheaves where the ears were more plentiful, and to let fall handfuls of the grain on purpose that she might pick them up innocently and increase her store.

¶ I have been interrupted by the visit of a lady of my congregation, who came to take leave; one, it appears, who has been warmly attached to the instruction given there. She told me the delight, the tears of gratitude, which she had witnessed in a poor girl to whom, in passing, I gave a kind look on going out of church on Sunday. What a lesson! How cheaply happiness can be given! What opportunities we miss of doing an angel's work! I remember doing it, full of sad feelings, passing on, and thinking no more about it; and it gave an hour's sunshine to a human life, and lightened the load of life to a human heart—for a time![1]

¶ There was a time, not so long ago, when the same simple and generous manners prevailed in Scotland among the agricultural class: when those who tilled the soil together fared alike, and masters and servants sat at the same table without any sense of incongruity or unfitness, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. The harvest-field was looked upon as a kind of communion-table in which master and servant recognized their common dependence upon the bounty of the universal Father, and

[1] F. W. Robertson, *Life and Letters*, 210.

acknowledged the sameness of their human nature and the sameness of their wants and destinies. And we cannot imagine that this kindly custom, any more than the sitting down together of master and servant at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the church, and partaking together of the holy symbols, lessened the respect of the servant for the master, or weakened the interest of the master in the servant. So far from putting either of the parties out of their proper place, it drew the relation between them closer, and imparted to it a more gentle and sacred character, of which neither could possibly take advantage. And assuredly, if the employer in every case treated his workmen as Boaz treated those who laboured in his harvest-field, there would be fewer grievances to complain of between them.[1]

I give thee joy! O worthy word!
Congratulate—A courtier fine,
Transacts, politely shuffling by,
The civil ceremonial lie,
Which, quickly spoken, barely heard,
Can never hope, nor e'en design,
To give thee joy!

I give thee joy! O faithful word!
When heart with heart, and mind with mind
Shake hands; and eyes in outward sign
Of inward vision, rest in thine;
And feelings simply, truly stirred,
Emphatic utterance seek to find,
And give thee joy!

I give thee joy! O word of power!
Believe, though slight the tie in sooth,
When heart to heart its fountain opes
The plant to water that with hopes
Is budding for fruition's flower—
The word, potential made, in truth
Shall give thee joy.

Shall give thee joy! Oh, not in vain,
For erring child the mother's prayer;
The sigh, wherein a martyr's breath
Exhales from ignominious death
For some lost cause! In humbler strain
Shall this poor word a virtue bear,
And give thee joy![2]

[1] Hugh Macmillan.

[2] Clough, *Poems*, 3.

4. Boaz came down from his residence in the town to see how the harvest work was going on, and his salutation to his people and their response show to us a state of things truly idyllic. In all the beautiful story there is not a finer touch than this devout and fervent greeting between master and servants in the barley-field. It is a most charming picture of the simple piety and pleasant manners of the early days. It appeals to the heart and quickens the imagination.

(1) What a fine example of *courtesy* does the greeting offer. It was with no haughty airs or rough speech that Boaz entered the harvest-field that lovely April day, bringing a shadow over the innocent gladness of the reapers, and giving them a painful sense of their inferiority. "The Lord be with you," was his courteous salutation; and they, with the reaping-hooks in their hands, and the sweat of honest labour streaming from their faces, paused in their toil among the golden sheaves, and standing up respectfully welcomed him with the equally courteous response, "The Lord bless thee."

Something that abode endued
With temple-like repose, an air
Of life's kind purposes pursued
With order'd freedom sweet and fair.
A tent pitch'd in a world not right
It seemed, whose inmates, every one
On tranquil faces bore the light
Of duties beautifully done,
And humbly, though they had few peers,
Kept their own laws, which seemed to be
The fair sum of six thousand years'
Traditions of civility.[2]

(2) The courtesy is not a superficial thing; for it is the outcome of *consideration*. In the story of this old-world harvest there is the mutual kindliness of disposition pervading the scene. Master and men seem alike interested in each other's welfare. The employer shows a kindly spirit towards those in his service, and they reciprocate it in the expression of good wishes for their master's prosperity. "The Lord be with you." "The Lord bless thee." There is kindliness, and mutual benediction, and identity of interests in that harvest-field.

[1] Coventry Patmore.

How little regard some masters have for the feelings of their dependants! What rough and harsh language do they address to them—a cowardly as well as an unchristian thing; for the servants cannot retaliate without the risk of losing their situation. It is of the very essence of Christianity to be tender and considerate, and so to regulate our speech and behaviour that those who are under us may manifest their individuality, act in character, and forget their inferior condition. And no one who loves the Lord Jesus, who humbled Himself and became our servant, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and so made service the highest dignity and blessedness of life, can possibly act otherwise than in the same spirit of meekness and tender courtesy towards others; with that gentleness which makes those who serve us try to do their best, and makes them great and not mean in their own hearts; which arouses them to a truer self-respect, and leads them into a higher life. The master is as much indebted to the servant as the servant is to the master; even more, if we consider that the servant gives time and health and strength and skill, in return for wages—the life for the means of living—things for which no money can be equivalent, and which can only be repaid in kind by courteous treatment and kindly sympathy and consideration.

¶ It is related of Sir Ralph Abercrombie, the hero of Aboukir, that, mortally wounded, he was carried on board one of his ships and a soldier's blanket placed under his head. He expressed relief, and then asked whose blanket was at his head. "Only a soldier's blanket," was the reply. "Whose blanket, did you say?" he queried earnestly. "Only one of the men's," came the reply a second time. "I wish to know the name of the man to whom this blanket belongs," he persisted. "It is Duncan Roy's, of the Forty-second, Sir Ralph." "Then," said the dying general, "see that Duncan Roy gets his blanket this very night. He will be cold without it, and I shall not need it then."[1]

¶ It is not wise as a rule to make comparisons between classes, but I am inclined to think that if it comes to the spirit of courtesy, which lies behind all manners, respectable working people, say, our artisans and their wives, will make a better show than their masters and their wives. They will be less concerned

[1] G. C. Peck, *Old Sins in New Clothes*, 269.

about their own dignity—which is always a sign of vulgarity; they will have more regard to the claims of other people; they will be more anxious not to hurt another's feelings, and they will be quicker to render services in the little exigencies of life; and all this is the fruit of courtesy. Were any woman (and I count this a perfect test) travelling with a young child and some articles of luggage, it would be better for her as a rule to take a place in a third-class rather than in a first-class carriage. The chances are that the richer people—unless they gathered from something she said or from her name upon a dressing-case that she was a person of distinction, in which case they would take any trouble in exact proportion to their own meanness—would eye her with displeasure, convey to her that the child was a nuisance, ignore the struggle with her luggage, and make her glad to leave the compartment. Were she to travel with an artisan and his wife, they would bid her welcome, and make her feel at home, and anticipate her wants and encompass her with observances, because she was a lonely woman with a child. And the service of a woman and a child is more than manners—it is the climax of courtesy.[1]

¶ Nothing becomes a lady better than courtesy; and as to this word, let not the vulgar herd—poor wretches!—be deceived, who think that courtesy is only another name for open-handedness; for to be open-handed is not courtesy in general, but a special form of it. Courtesy is the same as goodness; for, inasmuch as in the courts of old virtue and good manners were cultivated (as to-day their contraries are), this term was derived from the word court, so that courtesy meant the usage of the court. But if it were to be derived from the courts of the present day, especially in Italy, it would only be another term for what is base.[2]

¶ Livingstone treated every black man as if he were a blood-relation. He saluted the poorest with a very pleasant smile, and raised his gold-laced cap (the badge of his high office) a little above his head. Before the poorest African he maintained self-restraint and self-respect as carefully as in the best society at home.[3]

¶ Once when Dr. Stewart and Mr. Mzimba were travelling together to attend a meeting of Presbytery, they had to spend a night at a wayside inn. Knowing that hotel-keepers as a rule do not give up a bedroom to a native, Dr. Stewart, after being

[1] John Watson, *The Homely Virtues*, 165.

[2] Dante, *Convivio*, II. ii. 54–68, tr. by Toynbee.

[3] *Life of James Stewart of Livingstonia*, 90.

shown his room, asked the landlady what accommodation Mr. Mzimba was to have. "Oh," she said, "I will let him sleep in the loft outside." "Well, well," was the quiet rejoinder, "just let me see the place." They were taken to the loft above the stable. Dr. Stewart turned to Mr. Mzimba and said, in presence of the landlady, "You go and occupy my room, and I will sleep here." "Oh, no," was her reply, "I cannot allow that." "But I insist upon it," continued Dr. Stewart; "if you have no bedroom in the house to give my friend, he must take my room." The upshot was that Mr. Mzimba was shown into a comfortable room. During many years this landlady told this wonderful story to her guests. It seemed to have been the only experience of the kind she had known.[1]

(3) But there is more than courtesy and consideration in the greeting. There is genuine *piety*. We are struck most of all by the religious spirit which pervades the salutation. No doubt the words were the common Eastern salutation. Be it so. They still compare very favourably with many of our own salutations, and are vastly different in spirit from the language occasionally heard in the harvest-field to-day. They may be even the more significant because they were phrases in such ordinary use. A man's commonplace remarks will reveal his character more than his more studied and formal speeches.

Boaz, as we see in the course of the whole narrative, was habitually a devout man. He set the Lord always before his eyes, and acknowledged him in all his ways; and therefore it was a perfectly natural thing for him to introduce God's Name into the midst of his ordinary pursuits. He felt that it was by God's blessing that the barley crop had grown and ripened under the favouring heavens, until the reapers were now cutting it down with their sickles, and piling up its golden sheaves on the field. And with his own lips and language Boaz set before his servants an example of piety so beautiful that they could not but admire and imitate it.

The master blesses the men, and the men bless the master. It is like our church service, where the priest and the people mutually pray for one another: "The Lord be with you," "And with thy spirit." And indeed, perhaps, that very verse and response were in the first place taken from this simple salutation

[1] *Life of James Stewart*, 274.

of Boaz and his reapers. They little thought, when with kind and devout hearts they so bade good day to each other, that they were setting a pattern for a holy service, which the Church of God, guided by His Spirit, would take up from them and use for ever. Yet so it is. They have somewhat of the same honour given them as David in the Old Testament, the blessed Virgin, Simeon, Zacharias, and others in the New—the honour of having their words appointed to be used by all Christians in their solemn offices of praise and thanksgiving—one of the greatest honours, surely, on this side the grave.[1]

¶ Abraham reckoned the servants of his household as so many "souls." He valued them by what was best in them—the distinctively human and immortal part. A modern master or farmer reckons his servants as so many "hands." He values in them only what subserves his purpose, and holds the rest as of no account; therefore it need not be wondered at that men so rated sometimes behave in a manner as irrational as if they were hands and not souls, and break out into those lawless revolts which convulse industry and are disastrous to all concerned. Long experience as well as Scripture teaches us that he who feareth not God regardeth not man; that the fear of God is the only sure foundation of truth among men in their dealings with one another; and that where this fear is absent the issue is invariably want of mutual confidence and selfish alienation. The brotherhood of man must grow out of and be nourished by the same root as the Fatherhood of God. The commandment is binding, is absolute, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

¶ The world in these days is full of loud assertion about rights. But in the Bible we read not about rights, but about duties. He to whom all rights belong came not to assert any rights, but to fulfil all duty, and He says, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." Sin is the great divider between man and man, for its essence is selfishness. Christ came to do away with sin by His own death, and to unite us to God and to one another in Himself. He draws men to each other by drawing them to God in Himself. Looking, then, on their servants, made in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ, not as "hands" but as "souls," and regarding the workers themselves as more valuable than their work, their thoughtful minds and sensitive hearts as more precious than anything produced by the labour of their hands—let masters say,

[1] J. Keble.

"We seek not yours, but you." And so the gracious greeting of the master to his servants will ever be, in the workshop and in the market-place and in the field, "The Lord be with you," and the gracious response of the servants will inevitably be "The Lord bless thee."

The Call of Samuel.

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THE CALL OF SAMUEL.

And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel said, Speak: for thy servant heareth.—1 Sam. iii. 10.

1. FOR Samuel a great change was necessary and imminent. Up to this moment he had lived largely in the energy and motive-power of his mother's intense religious life. It was needful that he should exchange the traditional for the experimental. His faith must rest, not on the assertions of another's testimony, but on the fact that for himself he had seen, and tasted, and handled the Word of life. Not at second-hand, but at first, the Word of the Lord must come to him, and be passed on to all Israel.

2. It was the call of Samuel to his life's work. Circumstances, as we say, but circumstances of which a mother's prayer was part, determined the sphere in which that work was to be done. "The child ministered unto the Lord before Eli." Then came the Divine voice calling him by name; calling him, out of the many possibilities of an office which he shared with such men as Eli's sons, to his own special and high prophetic destiny. The true nature of that call, misunderstood by him at first, was interpreted by the experienced insight of the aged Eli. "Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child." In obedience he accepted the call—"Speak: for thy servant heareth." And by that acceptance his character is sealed evermore. "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." We are not all called to be prophets, but we are called, in our varying ways, to minister to the Lord; and we may learn from this typical history how to recognize and answer our call.

The subject is the Call of a Man to the Work of his Life.

I. The Persons who are Called.
II. The Time of the Call.
III. Its Manner.
IV. Its Purpose.
V. The Responsibility.

I.

The Persons who are Called.

1. The call of Samuel is an extreme and vivid instance of a truth of which the Bible is full—the truth that we are all called of God to our several places and occasions of action or of passion, of working or of waiting in the world; in a word, that we all have a vocation. We hardly need the Bible to tell us this, for it is one of the simplest truths of natural religion. The evidences of providential purpose in the world have been criticized in every age, and never more so than in our own. But they have proved too strong to be upset by criticism, and still remain, as they have ever been, among our most necessary forms of thought. And as man is the crown and climax of the visible creation, we naturally expect the purpose which is so abundantly visible elsewhere, to obtain also in the life of man. He too must have a purpose; and to be created for a purpose is, in the case of a free being, to be called to its fulfilment. Thus the vocation of man is a corollary from the design in the world, and may fairly, therefore, be called a part of our natural religion. The New Testament takes up and intensifies this thought, addressing Christians as "the called of Jesus Christ," "called to be saints," "called according to God's purpose," "called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord," "called out of the darkness," "called to liberty," "called to eternal life," "called to inherit a blessing," "called to glory and virtue," and bidding us "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called."

> What is the course of the life
> Of mortal men on the earth?—
> Most men eddy about
> Here and there—eat and drink,
> Chatter and love and hate,
> Gather and squander, are raised

Aloft, are hurled in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving
Nothing; and then they die—
Perish, and no one asks
Who or what they have been,
More than he asks what waves,
In the moonlit solitudes mild
Of the midmost Ocean, have swelled,
Foam'd for a moment, and gone.

That is no untrue picture of the spectacle of life: and yet these men, whose career the poet likens to "an eddy of purposeless dust," have none the less been called one by one to glory and to virtue, and shall be called again from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, that God may judge His people.[1]

¶ No one can understand any work aright unless he is called to it. Vocation is of two kinds: either it is Divine, comes from above, or from those who have a right to command, and then it is a vocation of faith; or it is a vocation of love, and comes from our equals.[2]

—I hear from all-wards, all-wise understand,
The great bird Purpose bears me 'twixt her wings,
And I am one with all the kinsmen things
That e'er my Father fathered. Oh, to me
All questions solve in this tranquillity.[3]

2. There have been times when thoughts like these involved men in serious perplexity as to the compatibility of Divine election with the freedom of the human will. And great caution was then needed in their treatment. But our age, as a whole, has reacted from all such tendencies; and our danger lies in the very opposite direction, that of doubting, or at least ignoring, a particular providence in human affairs. We tend to forget that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father; and that the very hairs of our head are numbered. We can hardly, therefore, in the present day insist too much upon the thought that our choice and pursuance of a profession in life means our acceptance or rejection of a Divine vocation.

¶ Master Joachim Mörlein has pleased me well to-day with his sermon, for he spoke of the office and vocation of a wife, and

[1] J. R. Illingworth. [2] Luther. [3] Sidney Lanier.

a maid-servant—namely, that a wife should think she lives in a Holy Order, and that a servant also may know that her works are good and holy works. This the people can carry home.[1]

3. The call may need interpretation. Here again the case of Samuel comes before us. The voice which called him was interpreted by Eli. "Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child." And all our secret inspirations need a similar process of testing, in the light of our own experience or that of others. Their congruity with our character and circumstances, their relation to our own past prayers, the aspect which they present to unbiased advisers of spiritual mind, their correspondence with what we know of the ways in which others have been led, the degree of their persistence under adverse conditions, are among the points to be considered as throwing light upon our vocation. And when such considerations coincide with and confirm the outward guidance of our circumstances and the inward attraction which we believe to be Divine, we may go forward in the hope that the Lord is with us, and will "let none of our words fall to the ground."

¶ And then, Mary, you (I think rightly, *in the general*) speak much of the *intention* of God in earthly events by which He deals with us: what then would you say about my case? Do these two years and more waiting not show that I am seeking my work in the wrong direction, or why do they not show this, or *how* long would show this? Possibly you may say, "Wait till some evident call to some other work arises"; but then, of course, evident calls enough would soon arise were I to put myself in the way of them, *e.g.*, were I to go along to Clark the publisher and ask him for some work, or go out to Harvey of Merchiston and ask him for some; whereas, so long as I keep myself back from such openings they are not a tenth part so likely to arise. But apart from growlery, let me give you a problem. I will give it you in the concrete, as being easier stated and easier apprehended. Is it right of me to wait and see whether I get a call or no, and let this decide whether I ought or ought not to take a charge? To me it seems not (though it's just what I'm doing), and on this ground, because in fact we find that God has often suffered men to enter the Church who were not worthy—because, that is, the call of the people does not always represent the call of God.[2]

[1] Luther. [2] M. Dods, in *Early Letters of Marcus Dods*, 198.

4. But while the call sometimes needs interpretation, the responsibility for hearing it is always our own; and we must not be withdrawn from the path of duty by the wishes or fears of others, still less by considerations of how our course of conduct may appear in their eyes. There is, as usual, deep truth in Shakespeare's words, "To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

As I look from the isle, o'er its billows of green
To the billows of foam-crested blue,
Yon bark that afar in the distance is seen,
Half dreaming, my eyes will pursue:
Now dark in the shadow, she scatters the spray
As the chaff in the stroke of the flail;
Now white as the sea-gull, she flies on her way,
The sun gleaming bright on her sail.

Yet her pilot is thinking of dangers to shun,—
Of breakers that whiten and roar;
How little he cares, if in shadow or sun
They see him that gaze from the shore!
He looks to the beacon that looms from the reef,
To the rock that is under his lee,
As he drifts on the blast, like a wind-wafted leaf,
O'er the gulfs of the desolate sea.

Thus drifting afar to the dim-vaulted caves
Where life and its ventures are laid,
The dreamers who gaze while we battle the waves
May see us in sunshine or shade;
Yet true to our course, though our shadow grow dark,
We'll trim our broad sail as before,
And stand by the rudder that governs the bark,
Nor ask how we look from the shore![1]

II.

The Time of the Call.

1. "Samuel was laid down to sleep, and the Lord called Samuel." God calls men at unlikely times. The child is gone to

[1] Oliver Wendell Holmes.

rest, to forget in sleep the weariness of the day, and when he goes into the quietness of his own retreat, thinking that the day's work is all over, God calls him. There is no night with God; He shines through the everlasting day. He has no set times, and formal periods, and prescribed seasons in which to speak to men. When we may say, "Let us be quiet now, the child has gone to rest; let nothing disturb the young slumberer," God comes along the pathway of the darkness, and speaks to the child.

¶ If we had an ear to hear we should not be slow to perceive that God speaks to us at unlikely times. You say, now this is a likely morning in which God will speak to us. We are gathered from many quarters into His house of prayer, and we are here waiting to know what God the Lord will say; and yet it is quite possible we may go away from this chosen place without hearing anything. And sometimes, when we think God a long way off, and we have our own little circle of thought and speculation—when we are apparently given up to ourselves—God will come unexpectedly to us, and call us and talk to us, and strike through our souls mysteries and counsels that make us tremble, and wonder, and pray.[1]

¶ Here is a man who is saying to himself, fit auditor, indeed—"This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and I will say to my soul, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry'"; and just as he has concluded his monologue, a voice, terrible as the hand that Belshazzar saw, says to him from a hidden place, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee"—an unlikely time.

2. The call came when the Tabernacle was hushed, when the lamp went out, and Samuel was laid down to sleep. In solitude and silence, when the voices of the day's disturbance are at rest, God is heard speaking in the heart. So it has ever been. The soul opens its doors to listen when the sounds which attack the senses are not heard. The Invisible One is felt in our consciousness in the lonely places of the earth. There are strange whispers which beset us when the heart is wearied of the world, when work seems vanity, when pleasure is removed, when life passes before us like a dream. We seem to know then what we really are, and wait for a revelation. Then the

[1] Joseph Parker.

everlasting Father calls His son, and calls him by his name: "Samuel, Samuel, know me; remember me, love me. I stretch out my hands to thee. I am thy Father, hear my voice; come, my child, learn of me righteousness and love, duty and the power of redeeming." It is a personal cry. He who calls, we know then, is akin to us, a living One who lives for us, with love to answer our love.

Not every soul may hear,
Yet to the listening ear
God's lips are ever near.

III.

The Manner of the Call.

1. When God speaks He does not always accompany the message with such visible signs as would make acceptance an outward necessity rather than an act of willing obedience. God spoke to Samuel, and there was no outward glory seen. No vision of light accompanied the voice; no form was revealed to assist the ear in the recognition of the Speaker. Neither was the voice audible to any but the child; so that there was no correlative testimony of others to assist him in distinguishing from whom it came, as its solemn accents thrilled upon the silence of the night. Nor does it appear that there was anything in the nature of the voice itself which would prove it to be Divine, or else why did Samuel twice run to Eli, thinking that the old man had called him? It needed the experience of the aged priest to instruct the boy as to the Divinity of the Speaker. "Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child."

¶ They who are living religiously have from time to time truths they did not know before, or had no need to consider, brought before them forcibly; truths which involve duties, which are in fact percepts, and claim obedience. In this and such-like ways Christ calls us now. There is nothing miraculous or extraordinary in His dealings with us. He works through our natural faculties and circumstances of life. Still, what happens to us in providence is in all essential respects what His voice was to those whom He addressed when on earth. Whether He commands by a visible presence, or by a voice, or by

our conscience, it matters not, so that we feel it to be a command.[1]

2. Let us think of some of the ways in which the call of God may come to us.

(1) *In nature.*—Are there not days when the mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing, and the trees of the field clap their hands, because God is speaking to them? Do you not lift up your eyes to the heavens at night, and watch the stars, and seem to hear God speaking to you in the solemn silence?

¶ I can imagine at once how impatiently the cynic will sneer at what he will regard as a poetic fancy which has been worn threadbare into a deceptive platitude. It was so in the days of the Preacher. "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh." And so they cannot even learn that lesson which to us comes intuitively and at once, that Nature is but visible spirit; that God is, and that He is a God of Love. Not to the base, not to the sensual, not to the cold cynic, not to the insolent scorner, but

> Every bird that sings,
> And every flower that stars the elastic sod,
> And every breath the radiant summer brings,
> *To the pure spirit* is a Word of God.

I will quote here the language of one who is dubious about many Christian truths, and I will quote him to show why it is that, standing with uncovered head and awful reverence in the mighty Temple of the Universe, a believer holds that God loves him, and wills his happiness. "The earth," he says, "is sown with pleasures, as the heaven is studded with stars; and when a man has not been happy in life, we do not hesitate to declare that he has missed one of the aims of his existence. The path of the years is paved and planted with enjoyments. Flowers the noblest and the loveliest—colours the most gorgeous and the most delicate—odours the sweetest and the subtlest—harmonies the most soothing and the most stirring—the sunny glories of the day—the pale Elysian graces of the moonlight—'silent pinnacles of aged snow' in one hemisphere—the marvels of tropical luxuriance in another—the serenity of sunsets, the

[1] J. H. Newman

sublimity of storms—everything is bestowed in boundless profusion; we can conceive or desire nothing more exquisite or perfect than that which is around us every hour." That, then, is one revelation, but it is not all; for I add that Nature, which is but the visible translucence of a Divine agency working upon material things, reveals to us also that this happiness is attainable only in the path of obedience—that this "not ourselves" (if any feel happier by the use of such pantheistic abstractions) is a not-ourselves which makes for righteousness. Winds blow this lesson to us, and waters roll it, and every leaf is inscribed with it, as those on which the Sibyl wrote out her prophecies of old.[1]

Thou need'st not rest: the shining spheres are Thine
That roll perpetual on their silent way,
And Thou dost breathe in me a voice divine,
That tells more sure of Thine eternal sway;
Thine the first starting of the early leaf,
The gathering green, the changing autumn hue;
To Thee the world's long years are but as brief
As the fresh tints that Spring will soon renew.
Thou needest not man's little life of years,
Save that he gather wisdom from them all;
That in Thy fear he lose all other fears,
And in Thy calling heed no other call.
Then shall he be Thy child to know Thy care,
And in Thy glorious Self the eternal Sabbath share.[2]

(2) *In Providence.*—The accidents and events of life are, as is obvious, one special way in which the calls of God come to us; and they, as we all know, are, in their very nature, and as the word accident implies, sudden and unexpected. A man is going on as usual; he comes home one day, and finds a letter, or a message, or a person, bringing a sudden trial on him, which, if met religiously, will be the means of advancing him to a higher state of religious excellence, but which at present he as little comprehends as the unspeakable words heard by St. Paul in Paradise.

Perhaps it may be the loss of some dear friend or relative through which the call comes to us; showing us the vanity of things below, and prompting us to make God our sole stay. We through grace do so in a way we never did before; and in

[1] F. W. Farrar. [2] Jones Very.

the course of years, when we look back on our life, we find that that sad event has brought us into a new state of faith and judgment, and that we are now other men than we were. We thought, before it took place, that we were serving God, and so we were in a measure; but we find that, whatever our present infirmities may be, and however far we may still be from the highest state of illumination, then at least we were serving the world under the show and the belief of serving God.

¶ A great sorrow—like any other possession—is a great trust. The very magnitude of a great calamity or grief confers in itself the privilege of exception, and, in the measure in which it brings "detachment," it brings that true mastery of self without which —no matter how much else we may attain—our lives must be incomplete. With some such catastrophe, involving the apparent ruin of his life, and bringing with it his betrayal by those in whom he trusted, Jacques Rutebeuf seems to have been face to face when he wrote—

Que sont mi ami devenu
Que j'avoie si près tenu
Et tant amé?
Je cuit li vens les a osté;
L'amor est morte.
Ce sont ami que venz emporte
Et il ventoit devant ma porte.

This, however, is not the language of him who has won freedom in the loss of things earthly, and to whom—though the favourable answer sought with prayer and bitter tears has been denied—the gates of heaven itself have been unlocked. It is the complaint of one who dreads the unkindness of the blast and the sharp sting of trust and love betrayed.[1]

(3) *In the Moral Law.*—The God who reveals Himself to us in Nature and in Providence, reveals Himself also in the Moral Law. It needed no voice from the rolling darkness, it needed no articulate thunder leaping among the fiery hills, to persuade mankind that "God spake these words, and said." For that law was written on their hearts, their conscience also bearing them witness. The Jews believe that the souls of all Jews, for generations yet unborn, were summoned from their antenatal home to

[1] Lady Dilke, *The Book of the Spiritual Life*, 168.

hear the Deliverance of the Fiery Law; and when a Jew is charged with wrong by another, he says, "My soul too has been on Sinai." But it is the souls not of Jews only, but of all mankind, that have been there.

¶ The great philosopher of Germany might well doubt of all things, till he had found that their certitude rested on the indestructible basis of duty. If all else were shattered under our feet, that would still remain. False miracles themselves could not rob us of it. As in that grand legend of the Talmud, the tree might at the words of the doubter be transplanted from its roots; the rivulet might flow backward to its source; the walls and pillars of the conclave might crack; yea, a voice from heaven itself might preach another Law; yet neither rushing trees, nor backward-flowing waters, nor bending roofs, nor miracles, nor mysterious voices should prevail against our solid and indestructible conviction, and the Eternal Himself should approve our constancy and exclaim from the mid glory of His Throne, "My sons have triumphed." [1]

¶ We must date our full manhood from the hour in which we know that God is speaking to us. This is the third epoch in life. When the conscience becomes king the man is born; and conscience means the knowledge that one has of one's self in the presence of God. Until the moral nature burns and smokes, and rolls forth its thunders and flashes its terrible lightnings; until the soul becomes a Mount Sinai, receiving, reading, recording, and delivering the eternal law of God, the man is not born. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the early songs of Tennyson. There is little in them because the moral nature of the poet is yet to come, because the full man is yet to come. In all those early years there is much loveliness, wonderful sensitiveness to the beauty of nature and art, the power to revel in the charming fields of fancy. But the voice that afterwards shook the nation is not in them. "The Vision of Sin" breaks the silence. "The Two Voices" tells of the mistake and the brave endeavour to escape from it, the terrible sorrow in which doubt struggles into faith, and out of which "In Memoriam" comes, and reveals a new man. The poet is fully here when the man is here, and the man is here when the conscience is here.[2]

Whenever my heart is heavy,
And life seems sad as death,
A subtle and marvellous mockery
Of all who draw their breath,

[1] F. W. Farrar. [2] G. A. Gordon.

And I weary of the throned injustice,
The rumour of outrage and wrong,
And I doubt if God rules above us,
And I cry, O Lord, how long,
How long shall sorrow and evil
Their forces around them draw!
Is there no power in Thy right hand?
Is there no life in Thy law?

Then at last the blazing brightness
Of day forsakes its height,
Slips like a splendid curtain
From the awful and infinite night;
And out of the depths of distance,
The gulfs of purple space,
The stars steal, slow and silent,
Each in its ancient place,—
Each in its armour shining,
The hosts of heaven arrayed,
And wheeling through the midnight,
As they did when the world was made.

And I lean out among the shadows
Cast by that far white gleam,
And I tremble at the murmur
Of one mote in the mighty beam,
As the everlasting squadrons
Their fated influence shed,
While the vast meridians sparkle
With the glory of their tread.
That constellated glory
The primal morning saw,
And I know God moves to His purpose,
And still there is life in His law.[1]

(4) *In Scripture.*—The Lord speaks to us chiefly through His Word. What converse God has with His people when they are quietly reading their Bibles! In the quiet of our room, as we have been reading a chapter, have we not felt as if God spoke those words straight to our heart there and then? Has not Christ Himself said to us, while we have been reading His Word, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also

[1] H. P. Spofford.

in me"? The text does not seem to be like an old letter in a book; rather is it like a fresh speech newly spoken from the mouth of the Lord to us.

¶ It is well to notice that the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord. Let us not seek for revelations through dreams or visions, but by the Word of God. Nothing is more harmful than to contract the habit of listening for voices, and sleeping to dream. All manner of vagaries come in by that door. It is best to take in hand and read the Scriptures reverently, carefully, thoughtfully, crying, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." And in response there will come one clear, defined, and repeated message, asseverated and accentuated with growing distinctness from every part of the inspired volume, "This is the way—walk in it; this is My will—do it; this is My word—speak it." Let us hear what God the Lord shall speak.[1]

(5) *In the Spirit.*—God has a way sometimes of speaking to the heart by His Spirit—not usually apart from His Word—but yet there are certain feelings and emotions, tendernesses and tremblings, joys and delights, which we cannot quite link with any special portion of Scripture laid home to the heart, but which seem to steal upon us unawares by the direct operation of the Spirit of God upon the heart.

¶ I think we are not half as mindful as we ought to be of the secret working of the Holy Spirit upon the mind. This is a very different thing from being guided by the Spirit of God in all the actions of life so as to obey the will of the Lord, sometimes in cases where we might not have known it to be His will, or might have omitted it. Whenever you feel moved to do anything that is good, do it. Do it even without being moved, because it is your duty, for "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." But, above all, when there comes a gracious influence on the conscience, a gentle reminder to the heart, quickly and speedily do as the Spirit prompts, taking note within your heart that the Lord has laid this particular burden upon you, and you must not cast it from you.[2]

¶ When Hort decided to enter the ministry he wrote to his parents giving his reasons for the decision. The letter proceeds in this way: "I have hitherto studiously confined myself

[1] F. B. Meyer. [2] C. H. Spurgeon.

to considerations and arguments. But if these were my only inducements I could not think myself justified in entering on so awful a responsibility; how, then, could I answer the question, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration?" Here, then deliberately, yet with reverence I say, that I trust and believe that I *am* moved by the Holy Ghost. Nothing less should satisfy me. I believe that the strong and permanent inclination that I feel is of God. I know how miserably and imperfectly I serve Him. I fall into sin, more especially into coldness, indifference, and forgetfulness of Him through the day, yet in the midst of this repeatedly it seems as if He clutched hard at me, and I would not come; and I cannot believe but that He is thus drawing me perseveringly towards His service."[1]

We need not hear an articulate voice, such as bade Augustine "take and read." Yet kindred experiences even to this are commoner by far than most men dream. Augustine's intellectual friends might easily have explained that voice away; but it was the crisis of his history, and through that history it has echoed, and still echoes, with incalculable power in the world to-day. Doubtless, too, it might have been called an irrational and foolish impulse which led St. Francis to stake his all upon the chance occurrence of a passage in the Gospel at a particular moment of his life; still, it was an impulse fraught with untold blessing for subsequent ages of men. In a word, these things are not accidents. They are ways in which God, the Holy Ghost, chooses the weak things of the world to confound the wise; flashing on the mind in an instant, through some chance thought, or sight, or sound, the conviction of His nearness, and the message of His will.

Blessed be Thou for all the joy
  My soul has felt to-day!
Oh, let its memory stay with me,
  And never pass away!

I was alone, for those I loved
  Were far away from me;
The sun shone on the withered grass,
  The wind blew fresh and free.

[1] *Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, i. 35.

Was it the smile of early spring
That made my bosom glow?
'Twas sweet; but neither sun nor wind
Could cheer my spirit so.

Was it some feeling of delight
All vague and undefined?
No; 'twas a rapture deep and strong,
Expanding in the mind.

Was it a sanguine view of life,
And all its transient bliss,
A hope of bright prosperity?
Oh, no! it was not this.

It was a glimpse of truth divine
Unto my spirit given,
Illumined by a ray of light
That shone direct from heaven.

I felt there was a God on high,
By whom all things were made;
I saw His wisdom and His power
In all His works displayed.

But most throughout the moral world,
I saw His glory shine;
I saw His wisdom infinite,
His mercy all divine.

Deep secrets of His providence
In darkness long concealed,
Unto the vision of my soul
Were graciously revealed.

But while I wondered and adored
His majesty divine,
I did not tremble at His power:
I felt that God was mine.

I knew that my Redeemer lived;
I did not fear to die;
Full sure that I should rise again
To immortality.

I longed to view that bliss divine,
Which eye hath never seen;
Like Moses, I would see His face
Without the veil between.[1]

IV.

The Purpose of the Call.

Its purpose is twofold. It is to call us *from* the world (in its evil sense), and *to* God. It is a detachment from the one and an attachment to the other.

1. *Detachment.*—When the rich young man was bidden to sell all that he had and give to the poor, the involved sacrifice was obvious. But though less obvious, the sacrifice need not be less real in the case of those whose undoubted vocation is to accept the responsibility of a great inheritance. To be called to assume early in life the serious attitude towards property which most men acquire only after years; to be daily accustomed to riches, and yet to be detached from them in heart; to forgo luxuries which are in our power; to maintain the warfare with temptation, when temptation is fortified and aided by one of its most invincible allies—this is, indeed, to live a life of sacrifice. Or again, to be called to public life, and amid its manifold distractions remain free from party bias or personal ambition, pure in purpose, high in aim, setting the affections upon things above, not on things on the earth—this, too, is a life of sacrifice, not less intense than when we long for fame and are called to obscurity, or for action and are called to passivity of pain. And it is the same at whatever career we look. We may drift into life aimlessly or selfishly, without much disturbing our ease; but no sooner do we view it as a Divine vocation than we are at once involved in sacrifice; for we are at necessary issue with the evil in ourselves and in the world. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

¶ He was a wise father who firmly severed the rope by which one son was precipitated into the abyss for ever, in order that he

[1] Anne Brontë.

might secure the other the half of his happiness. And if one-half of man's being can never fulfil its end in this life, it is but wise to give to it the eternal farewell resolutely and decisively, if the unexpected prospect present itself of enabling the other, which is, after all, the nobler half, to rise out of the caverned gloom into the light of day. Yet it is a desolate sensation and a sharp one—that act of drawing the knife across the strands of the cord, and saying, quietly, "For ever." Not a pleasant one when the sullen plunge of that which was once so cherished is heard below in the dark waters of a sea which never gives up her dead. . . . The other half is destined to ascend like the brother saved by the sacrifice of the other son.[1]

¶ Another man heard Berry preach his first sermon in Wolverhampton. From that day his place in the church was seldom empty morning or evening. He walked ten miles, in all weathers, every Sunday. He was a publican, holding a seven days' licence, and one day he came to his pastor and made himself known, and said: "Mr. Berry, I hear you preach every Sunday morning and then I go home and my house is open for the sale of drink from half-past twelve to half-past two. Your preaching has convinced me that this is not right. What must I do?" "Give it up," said Berry. He did so, and for seven years his house was never open on a Sunday. At the end of that time he came again to Berry and told him that he had scruples about continuing in his business at all. "Then come out of it," said Berry, and, although the house had been occupied by his father and himself for forty-five years, he rose to the sacrifice, and gave it up under the influence of the preaching of the man he had learnt to love and trust.[2]

2. *Attachment.*—It is a call to our life's work, a call to labour; but first it is a call to God. It is a common mistake to regard our work as leading us to God, rather than God as leading us to our work. But the latter is the true order of vocation. God calls us to Himself, and then sends us to labour in His vineyard, bids us reap where we have not sown, makes us fishers of men. This distinction, though it may seem subtle, is of great practical importance, for it involves the whole question of the right relation between character and conduct, the spiritual and the moral life. If we sever our moral life from its spiritual root—its root in the Father of Spirits—and confine our thoughts to any kind of merely

[1] F. W. Robertson, *Life and Letters*, 184.
[2] J. A. Drummond, *Charles A. Berry*, 252.

moral practice, however noble, we are liable by degrees to be too absorbed in our work, to over-estimate its importance and our own importance as its agents, to be unduly discouraged by failure or sudden avocation, and finally to lapse into the favourite fallacy of a busy but irreligious age—the fallacy that excess of action can atone for defect of character. Meanwhile, our work itself will lack the note of perfectness which spirituality alone can give, and be either outwardly ungracious or inwardly unreal. Whereas if we regard morality as a function of the spiritual life, and conduct as the consequence and not the cause of character, the natural and necessary outcome and expression of the inner man, all things will fall into their proper place.

¶ What, indeed, is the life spiritual, but that detached life of thought that brings with it increasing comprehension of the

> One life within us and abroad
> Which meets all motion and becomes its soul.

In its highest sense, it is the one means whereby we may come at some revelation of the true significance and mystery of the Christian dogma of the Incarnation and behold the triumph of the spirit over the flesh: that sovereign triumph not to be won without pain and sorrow and much labour, yet surely to be won by all those who will obey the commandment which Chaucer sums for us in the words—

> Hold the hye wey, and let thy ghost thee lede.[1]

V.

The Responsibility.

1. God's call may be obeyed or it may be disobeyed. There lies our responsibility. Samuel answered by prompt obedience. Very different in its circumstances was St. Paul's call, but it resembled Samuel's in this respect, that, when God called, he, too, promptly obeyed. When St. Paul heard the voice from heaven, he said at once, trembling and astonished, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This same obedient temper of his is stated or implied in the two accounts which he himself gives of his miraculous conversion. In the 22nd chapter of Acts he says, "And I said,

[1] Lady Dilke, *The Book of the Spiritual Life*, 148.

What shall I do, Lord?" And in the 26th, after telling king Agrippa what the Divine speaker said to him, he adds what comes to the same thing, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." Similarly, we read of the Apostles, that "Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him." Again, when He saw James and John with their father Zebedee, "he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." And so of St. Matthew at the receipt of custom, "he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him."

¶ The biographer of the lives of François and Christina Coillard ("Coillard of the Zambesi"), in describing the departure of Christina Mackintosh to join her intended husband in South Africa, says: "A few weeks' visit to Asnières followed that she might know his mother, and Christina sailed for South Africa in the *John Williams* (November 23, 1860). 'Such grief I never saw and can hardly bear to think of now,' said her sister, writing of it forty-five years later. Those who have passed through such experiences know that the sense of vocation in no way lessens the pain of parting, and indeed often makes it sharper. The heart which accepts that mysterious thing—the Call of God—suffers in advance the anguish of all experiences to come, and at the moment there seems no joy, no element of compensation, only the conviction that it must be obeyed on peril of the soul. Indeed, the crisis of obedience is like death itself, for it is the step by which the soul passes from one sphere of being to another, and learns for the first time 'to walk by faith and not by sight.' Such is the moment to many when the grating of the gangway pulled ashore sounds the knell of the old life, and the voyage just beginning forms the true parable of the life to come."[1]

Though the shore we hope to land on
Only by report is known,
Yet we freely all abandon,
Led by that report alone;
And with Jesus
Through the trackless deep move on.

[1] *Coillard of the Zambesi*, 98.

2. If we have heard Him speak in this way, how have we received His Word? Perhaps with joy at first, with hope, excitement, eager faith? Yes, perhaps so. But the question for us all is: How long has the eagerness lasted; has the faith grown cold; have the ideals become worn out by length of time; has the hope been chilled by trial; has the perseverance grown craven; have we, who placed ourselves in the front of the battle, fled from it to take our pleasure, or deserted to the army of selfish wealth and engrossing sin and the transient world? Alas, this is an experience we have all known, save a happy few. But in the silences of life we are troubled by echoes of the ancient cry; nor do we ever quite forget what we have once listened to in youth, what once we have thrilled to hear. And if we have not obeyed, or have fallen from obedience, God, at least, does not forget. If we have no perseverance, He has. Our leaving of Him, our neglect of righteousness, love, and justice, of our duties to men; our selfish, vain, or idle life, bring with them their necessary fruits. We must eat them, and we are poisoned by them. Bitterness, loneliness, sorrow, misery of heart, are ours by law. And then He speaks again: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." So we hear Him in the words of Jesus. And, tired with long ploughing under the yoke of our own will, which weighed heavier and heavier as the years went by; tired out by sowing and never reaping; worn with the trouble of loving ourselves only, and with the loneliness it brings; sick at last of the lie of accusing others as the cause of our troubles, when their cause is in ourselves; contrite and broken-hearted, but desiring to love God and to take all the consequences of loving Him; eager to be loved by Him, for we are too much alone; longing to try righteousness and to rest in its peace, to forgive others and to forgive ourselves—we answer, at last, in the darkness of life's tabernacle: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

¶ Professor Elmslie has said, "Eli is one of the most unfortunate men in the Bible. We constantly hear him described as a weak, worthless father, a mere worldling, with no heart or soul in him. I think if he could bring an action for libel against preachers and commentators, he would get generous damages.

Was his tuition so bad and defective that his sons turned out ill? Who was it that trained the child Samuel—the strong, powerful Samuel, who crushed abuses and corruptions, drove out idolaters, and won battles for Israel?" The Gospel is a savour from death unto death to those who are perishing, and a savour of life unto life in them that are being saved. The model ministry of Jesus produced different results in John from those in Judas. The influence of Eli was effective in moulding the character of Samuel, and yet it was impotent in the case of his own two sons.[1]

Still, as of old, Thy precious word
Is by the nations dimly heard;
The hearts its holiness hath stirred
Are weak and few.
Wise men the secret dare not tell;
Still in Thy temple slumbers well
Good Eli: O, like Samuel,
Lord, here am I!

Few years, no wisdom, no renown,
Only my life can I lay down;
Only my heart, Lord, to Thy throne
I bring; and pray
A child of Thine I may go forth,
And spread glad tidings through the earth,
And teach sad hearts to know Thy worth!
Lord, here am I!

Young lips may teach the wise, Christ said;
Weak feet sad wanderers home have led;
Small hands have cheered the sick one's bed
With freshest flowers:
O, teach me, Father! heed their sighs,
While many a soul in darkness lies
And waits Thy message; make me wise!
Lord, here am I!

And make me strong; that, staff and stay,
And guide and guardian of the way,
To Thee-ward I may bear, each day,
Some fainting soul.
Speak, for I hear; make pure in heart,
Thy face to see; Thy truth impart,
In hut and hall, in church and mart!
Lord, here am I!

[1] E. Morgan.

I ask no heaven till earth be Thine,
Nor glory-crown, while work of mine
Remaineth here; when earth shall shine
Among the stars,
Her sins wiped out, her captives free,
Her voice a music unto Thee,
For crown, new work give Thou to me!
Lord, here am I!

The Stone of Help.

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THE STONE OF HELP.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.—1 Sam. vii. 12.

1. THE Israelites had rejected the Lord as their God before the prophet Samuel was raised to teach them and to deliver them from their enemies, and consequently they were severely oppressed by the Philistines. Samuel assured Israel that if they would return unto the Lord with all their hearts He would deliver them out of the hands of the Philistines. They turned to the Lord; they put away their idols; they renounced their evil habits; and they asked the prophet to pray to the Lord for them. Their enemies, the Philistines, came against Israel when they were actually engaged in renewing their covenant with the Lord under the guidance of the prophet. "But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten down before Israel. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

¶ "Are we not all guests of Allah?" says the Arab of the desert, as he welcomes the stranger to his tent and showers upon him all that hospitality can suggest. The simple words well indicate the situation. "Guests of Allah" are we all on our very entrance into the world, and "Guests of Allah" we remain to the close of our sojourn. We are partakers of a store we have not prepared, spectators of a beauty we have not conceived or executed, and sharers of a glory we only dimly understand.[1]

2. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The characteristic feature of the inscription lies in the word "hitherto." It was no

[1] M. C. Albright, *The Common Heritage*, 135.

doubt a testimony to special help obtained in that time of trouble; it was a grateful recognition of that help; and it was an enduring monument to perpetuate the memory of it. But it was more, much more. The word "hitherto" denotes a series, a chain of similar mercies, an unbroken succession of Divine interpositions and Divine deliverances. The special purpose of this inscription was to link on the present deliverance to all the past, and to form a testimony to the enduring faithfulness and mercy of a covenant-keeping God.

¶ The name "Ebenezer" has become a Christian name. The English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who loved the Old Testament, were fond of giving Hebrew names to their children. They called their girls by such names as Hagar, Leah, Dinah, Kezia; and they might name their boys Abraham, Phinehas, Habakkuk, Ebenezer. Not only so, but a sailors' chapel in England is often called a "Bethel"; so among the small and simple meeting-houses which used to serve for the Free Churches in country districts there was one here and there that went by the name of the "Ebenezer."[1]

3. But was there not something strange in this inscription, considering the circumstances? Could Samuel have forgotten that tragic day at Shiloh—the bewildered, terrified look of the messenger that came from the army to bring the news, the consternation caused by his message, the ghastly horror of Eli and his tragic death, the touching death of the wife of Phinehas, and the sad name which she had, with such seeming propriety, given to her babe. Was *that* like God remembering them? Had Samuel forgotten how the victorious Philistines soon after dashed upon Shiloh like beasts of prey, plundering, destroying, massacring till nothing more remained to be done to justify the name of "Ichabod"? How could Samuel blot that chapter out of the history? Or how could he say, with that chapter fresh in his recollection, "*Hitherto* hath the Lord helped us"?

All that had Samuel considered well. Even amidst the desolations of Shiloh the Lord was helping them. He was helping them to know themselves, helping them to know their sins, and helping them to know the bitter fruit and woeful punishment of sin. He was helping them to achieve the great end for which He

[1] C. Jerdan.

had called them—to keep alive the knowledge of the true God and the practice of His worship, onward to the time when the great promise should be realized—when He should come in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

That "hitherto" is the word of a mighty faith. It includes as parts of one whole the disaster no less than the victory. The Lord was helping Israel no less by sorrow and oppression than by joy and deliverance. The defeat which guided them back to Him was tender kindness and precious help. He helps us by griefs and losses, by disappointments and defeats; for whatever brings us closer to Him, and makes us feel that all our bliss and well-being lie in knowing and loving Him, is helpful beyond all other aid, and strength-giving above all other gifts.

I see the wrong that round me lies,
I feel the guilt within;
I hear, with groan and travail-cries,
The world confess its sin.

Yet, in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings;
I know that God is good!

Not mine to look where cherubim
And seraphs may not see,
But nothing can be good in Him
Which evil is in me.

The wrong that pains my soul below
I dare not throne above:
I know not of His hate,—I know
His goodness and His love.

I dimly guess from blessings known
Of greater out of sight,
And, with the chastened Psalmist, own
His judgments too are right.[1]

[1] J. G. Whittier.

I.

The Help of the Lord.

"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

1. *We need the help of the Lord.*—Samuel seems to suggest that the Israelites had done their part. They had fulfilled the national expectation that every man should do his duty. Yet the achievement and glory of the deliverance which the Israelites had experienced, and the mercy which they had received, he ascribes entirely to Jehovah. It was His right arm that had gotten them the victory. He thundered from the heavens, sent panic into the hosts of the Philistines, and made them an easy prey to the Israelites.

Every man who understands his own heart, and who knows his own weakness, will readily assent to the proposition that we daily need in the soul the help of God in Christ. What light and warmth are to the animal world, what a mother is to her young child, God is to our religious life. Our spiritual life is born of God, and we need His grace to overcome the sin that is within, and the temptation that is without. To stand up against all forms of social evil uninjured in soul is to stand in the strength of One who only can "make us dwell in safety."

¶ The stone was a *Te Deum*: it bore no man's name, not even Samuel's; it said, "We praise thee, O God." Throughout Europe there is no lack of monuments, streets, and bridges which are named after battles; but only some of the inscriptions on them give God the glory. Even Lord Macaulay's lines are not to be commended which he puts into the mouth of the Huguenots about the battle of Ivry—

Now glory to the Lord of Hosts, from whom all glories are!
And glory to our sovereign liege, King Henry of Navarre!

Surely the Huguenot prince had no glory at all, by reason of the glory that excelleth.[1]

2. *The help of the Lord is always equal to our need.*—In the old world, kings and warriors acknowledged the impossibility of standing up against those whom God helps. Moses was more

[1] C. Jerdan.

than equal to the King of Egypt because God was with him. And the Christian man can say to-day, without fear of failure, "He that is for us is more than all the forces that are against us."

Tired! Well, what of that?
Didst fancy life was spent on beds of ease,
Fluttering the rose-leaves scattered by the breeze?
Come! rouse thee, work while it is call'd to-day!
Coward, arise—go forth upon the way!

Lonely! And what of that?
Some must be lonely; 'tis not given to all
To feel a heart responsive rise and fall,
To blend another life into its own;
Work may be done in loneliness; work on.

Dark! Well, what of that?
Didst fondly dream the sun would never set?
Dost fear to lose thy way? Take courage yet,
Learn thou to walk by faith and not by sight,
Thy steps will guided be, and guided right.

Hard! Well, what of that?
Didst fancy life one summer holiday
With lessons none to learn, and naught but play?
Go, get thee to thy task; conquer or die!
It must be learned,—learn it, then, patiently.

No help! Nay, 'tis not so;
Though human help be far, thy God is nigh,
Who feeds the ravens hears His children cry.
He's near thee wheresoe'er thy footsteps roam,
And He will guide thee, light thee, help thee home.

3. *God's help is conditioned on our co-operation in faith and love.*—"He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." Jesus answered and said, "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

(1) Divine help is conditioned on *prayer*. "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. . . . And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of

the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering unto the Lord; and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him."

O Thou who dwell'st between the cherubim,
Bow down Thine ear, and hear my sad complaint,
Bow down Thine eye, and see my deep distress;
Save, Father, that Thy children and the world
May know that Thou and only Thou art God.
In every gone-by trouble Thou hast heard,
Thou hast upheld, till now! Across the waste,
The dreary wilderness of trodden years,
Faith can full many an Ebenezer see,
Pillars erected to commemorate
The answered prayer, the great deliverance known.
I plead no merit, Lord; no worthiness;
I plead Thy Name, Thy promise; yea, I look
To Thee in Thy true temple, confident
That while the prayer of faith is lisped without,
Our great Melchizedek will incense give
From His gold censer in the sanctuary,
Perfumed by which my prayer acceptably
Will reach the presence of the Lord of Hosts.[1]

(2) Divine help is further conditioned on *self-help*. God helps those who help themselves. He works in living men and women. We must use the grace we have if we want more. We must walk in the light that shines to-day if we want more light to-morrow. Our Lord healed the withered hand after the man had "stretched it forth." The blind man had to "wash in the pool of Siloam" before he received his sight. If there is one man God cannot help it is the man who sits with folded arms waiting for something to turn up. "Things *work together* for good." God works in us, and we are to "work out our own salvation."

(3) Divine help is also conditioned on *whole-hearted consecration* to God. "And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your heart, then put away the strange gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only; and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

[1] Ebenezer Palmer.

Lord, oft I come unto Thy door,
But when Thou openest it to me,
Back to the dark I shrink once more,
Away from light and Thee.

Lord, oft some gift of Thee I pray;
Thou givest bread of finest wheat;
Empty I turn upon my way,
Counting a stone more sweet.

Thou bidst me speed; then sit I still;
Thou bidst me stay; then do I go;
Lord, make me Thine in deed and will,
And ever keep me so![1]

II.

Memorials of Help.

"Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen."

1. This stone in Celtic would be called a cromlech. From the earliest times men have reared stones; for instance, the stones of Stonehenge, and the great and lonely cromlechs that you meet with, both in the far East and in the far West. These stones reared by men in the distant past indicate their littleness and their greatness. They indicate their littleness, because they are conscious that their time on earth is brief, and that they will soon be forgotten; and they, therefore, desire to link the memory of their life, their joy, their victory, or their devotion, with some permanent memorial which in after years will record where they suffered and conquered and prayed. Thus man, knowing that he has but a short time to live, tries to defy the ravages of time, and, in erecting the cromlech, confesses his transience. Yet the cromlech witnesses to the greatness of man—that man is able to invest with such associations a stone that was before uninteresting. A mere block of granite or limestone becomes ever after interesting, because one man sinned, suffered, repented, conquered, prayed.

¶ What do I think of *souvenirs*? I like them *much*, provided they are not costly. Yet I know not whether I do not like even

[1] Lizette Woodworth Reese.

more to dispense with symbols altogether. For they gather round them, by constant use, new associations, by which the old are obliterated, the precious and hallowed first ones. All things worn or often seen are liable to this. The old habit of erecting an altar of stones to commemorate any signal event was different. It was revisited only at the interval of years, and infallibly brought back the old feeling with which it had stood in connection once. But ornaments, and such things, collect *accretions* of daily incidents which they suggest, and the symbol does not naturally, but only arbitrarily, recall the person or idea intended to be consecrated by it. I have an insuperable objection to presents—almost a monomania; I am happier without receiving.[1]

¶ What a wonderful tribute it is to the greatness of human life that it can associate with a stone undying memories. It is the power of associating human life with Nature that makes these lands in which we live so fascinating. Why is it that Americans cross the Atlantic, and come again and again, and spend months and almost years, in our country? They have broader and richer territories yonder, nobler rivers, more magnificent and splendid ranges of mountains than they ever find in Great Britain. But here the race was cradled, and as the train rushes through our tiny island there is hardly a single point of view anywhere which is not interesting because of associations of human life that cluster around the mouldering walls of the ancient abbeys and cathedrals.[2]

¶ Last summer I sojourned for a few days in a village situated on the northern slopes of the Ochils. While there I heard frequent reference made to a curious stone called the "Ebenezer Stone," said to exist in a lonely spot far up among the hills. I resolved to see it, and set off one beautiful day, along with some friends, to look for it. After a long climb, and considerable search, we found it—a plain stone like a small gravestone, two feet six inches in height, and two feet broad. On the upper edge was deeply cut the word "Ebenezer." On one side was an inscription in Latin, which I translated thus: "Here out of darkness light shone forth, therefore glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, my God; and the name of this place is Light." On the other side were the well-known words of Isaiah: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." What was the meaning of it all? That stone with its inscrip-

[1] F. W. Robertson, *Life and Letters*, 172. [2] F. B. Meyer.

tions is a monumental record of a soul's history. More than a hundred years ago, a stranger came to these parts and set up as a sheep-farmer. He was reserved, moody, and distant. He had been trained for the ministry, but, owing to theological doubts, had never taken orders. He was long under the cloud. He walked in darkness and agony, until one blessed and ever-memorable day, on that lone hillside, the light shone upon his troubled soul, and he found God and peace. And so, like the patriarchs of old, he set up his stone of Ebenezer, of thankfulness to God, and there it stands to-day after a hundred years, an encouragement to every troubled and benighted soul.[1]

¶ I wonder if there ever was an old homestead in America which did not have its Ebenezer stone in the front yard; the old stone that was allowed to remain, the survivor of the rocky field of one hundred years ago, before the house was built, and all the rest were cleaned out, while this old rock was left. Its hard surface scooped out here and there to hold a little water for the robins and the sparrows that come to bathe and drink in the morning; its old sides embossed and bronzed with lichens and mosses, altogether worn with the feet of the children of three generations, embowered in wild vines and flowing honeysuckle—it stands there the sign of God's blessing from the wilderness of the past![2]

2. But in order that a memorial may have its value for the spiritual life, it has to be erected on a battlefield of the past, and it has to be the sign of our consecration to God's service in the future.

(1) Our memorials are erected *on the battlefields of the past.* Samuel's Ebenezer was placed on the site of an old battlefield. Twenty years before, a battle had been fought and lost upon that very site. Then the fields, which were now waving with corn, had been drenched with the blood of 30,000 men. There the corpses had been heaped highest, for there the last terrific conflict took place around the ark, where Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, with desperate vigour, gathered the people of Israel to preserve the sacred ark which, against the best judgment of Eli, had been brought into the van of the battle.

But it was not only the scene of defeat, it was the scene of victory; for, during the twenty years that had intervened, Samuel had been building up, had been reconstructing, the Hebrew State,

[1] D. Watson, *In Life's School*, 177. [2] E. J. Haynes.

until that great meeting at Mizpah. There he had rallied the whole nation round him, and there he had revived the national unity; there he had brought the people back to allegiance to God; they had swept down the mountain-side in irresistible onslaught, and when the Philistines attacked they overcame and drove them down to Bethcar. And so the stones reared up in a field which had been the scene of the most disastrous defeat, became twenty years after, because of moral and spiritual work that Samuel had done, the scene of the most stupendous victory.

¶ Now and again in the history of the world it has happened that the same spot has witnessed first a defeat and then a victory. During the Middle Ages the republic of Genoa, in Italy, was often at war with the republic of Pisa. On one occasion the Genoese were badly beaten in a sea-fight near the little island of Meloria; but the time came afterwards, in the year 1284, when the Genoese admiral, Oberto Doria by name, directed his warships to the same spot, and said, "Here is that rock; a Genoese defeat made it famous,—a victory would make it immortal." The result of the second battle was a great victory for Genoa. Half the Pisan fleet, of seventy-two galleys, was destroyed. The power of Pisa was crushed. So great was the number of prisoners taken by the Genoese that it was said, "To see Pisa, you must now go to Genoa." And Pisa was compelled to give up to Genoa the whole of Corsica and part of Sardinia, and to pay a fine of 160,000 gold pieces.

¶ Are there not battlefields in our life which have been the scenes of our disgraceful defeat? Are there not stones in the walls of our houses which have looked on and beheld our abominable and shameless sin, our irritability, our jealousy, our hot unkind and cruel words, things which, as we remember them to-day, fill our heart with horror that ever we could have had aught to do with them? But these same stones and bricks and walls are to look down upon victory where there was defeat, upon might where there was weakness, upon purity where there was defilement, upon the sweet and holy temper where there was the ungovernable passion, upon standing erect with God's light upon our brow, where we were prostrate beneath the heel of the enemy.[1]

(2) The stone of help erected by the Israelites was *a witness to the consecration of the people to God's service.* First Samuel

[1] F. B. Meyer.

made them put away their gods; and they vowed they would, and cast them from their pedestals, and the licentious impurities and usages were disavowed. Then the prophet of God took a ewer of water, whilst all the people watched him narrowly, and he poured out the water upon the ground. How it flashed in the Oriental sunlight! And as he did so he set forth the desire of himself and the people to pour out their hearts in confession before God, a most significant and beautiful sign. It was often referred to afterwards, as when some one said, "Ye people pour out your hearts before him." So, as he poured out the water, they poured out their tears, their sighs, their repentance, their yearning after a better life. But that was not all. The Philistines began to steal up the passes, and the people cried out with alarm. Samuel took a sucking lamb and sacrificed it whole upon the altar, to indicate the entire surrender of the people to God.

¶ The Odin Stone in the Orkneys had a hole through which men passed their hands, and, thus holding them, swore fealty to each other,—a practice recognized by the law of the islands down to a very recent period. Even as late as 1781 the elders were specially severe on a young man whose character was held in evil repute because he had "broken the oath of Woden." This stone was eighteen feet high, and stood outside the circle of Stennis.[1]

III.

The Past, the Present, and the Future.

"Hitherto."

"Thou hast not suffered me to see the Hereafter, but Thou hast allowed me to behold the Hitherto, and verily the Hitherto is glorious."[2]

Happiness is the shadow of things past,
Which fools still take for that which is to be!
And not all foolishly:
For all the past, read true, is prophecy,
And all the firsts are hauntings of some Last,
And all the springs are flash-lights of one Spring.[3]

[1] G. H. Dick. [2] G. Matheson. [3] Francis Thompson.

1. *The Past.*—The Ebenezer was set up by Samuel just after an ungrateful and sinning people had repented. God was merciful. The storm of lightning and the crash of thunder that had scattered the Philistines might have scattered *them.* But under the divinely-wise leadership of Samuel the great convention at Mizpah was closed by the erection of this stone; and it meant gratitude to Jehovah who both pardoned them and fought for them. There is an important sense in which we do not or ought not to forget the things which are behind. It is true we must be progressive as Christians and as Churches in all Christian excellences; we are not to become fossils; we are not to become mummies, standing erect but dead; we are to press on towards perfection. But a great impulse to progress comes from the retrospect of mercies received and victories won for us; so that we are not to forget the way by which God has led His Israel; with David we say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

¶ We delight to look down a long avenue of trees. It is delightful to gaze from end to end of the long vista, a sort of verdant temple, with its branching pillars and its arches of leaves; even so should we look down the long aisles of our years, at the green boughs of mercy overhead, and the strong pillars of loving-kindness and faithfulness which bear up our joys. Are there no birds in yonder branches singing? Surely there must be many, and they all sing of mercy received "hitherto."[1]

Oh, to go back across the years long vanished,
To have the words unsaid, the deeds undone,
The errors cancelled, the deep shadows banished,
In the glad sense of a new world begun;
To be a little child, whose page of story
Is yet undimmed, unblotted by a stain,
And in the sunrise of primeval glory
To know that life has had its start again!

I may go back across the years long vanished,
I may resume my childhood, Lord, in Thee,
When in the shadow of Thy cross are banished
All other shadows that encompass me;
And o'er the road that now is dark and dreary,
This soul, made buoyant by the strength of rest,

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

Shall walk untired, shall run and not be weary,
To bear the blessing that has made it blest.

2. *The Present.*—Those pillars, the sacraments, the songs of praise to which past mercies prompted, are scenes or means of present fellowship with God. We cannot live upon a vanished vision, or a good impression twenty or twenty-five years old. God is always new and fresh and bright as the dawn. The light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun. Have we a fellowship with God as we see Him in Christ, sweet and restful and refreshing, every day as we read a chapter of the Holy Book, as we kneel or walk about with Him in heart-easing conversation?

3. *The Future.*—"Hitherto" means more than it says. It looks forward as well as backward, and sees the future in the past. Memory passes into hope, and the radiance in the sky behind throws light upon our forward path. God's "hitherto" carries "henceforward" wrapped up in it. His past reveals the eternal principles which will mould His future acts. "He has helped, therefore He will help" is no good argument concerning men; but it is valid concerning God.

We may reason from the past to the future, but our confidence for the future must be based on the help of Him who in the past has not suffered us to be overthrown. The Christian's life is bound up in God, and only he can say of the past, the present, and the future: "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."

¶ When a man gets up to a certain mark and writes "hitherto," he is not yet at the end, there is still a distance to be traversed. More trials, more joys; more temptations, more triumphs; more prayers, more answers; more toils, more strength; more fights, more victories; and then come sickness, old age, disease, and death. Is it over now? No! there is more yet—awakening in Jesus' likeness, thrones, harps, songs, psalms, white raiment, the face of Jesus, the society of saints, the glory of God, the fulness of eternity, the infinity of bliss. O be of

good courage, believer, and with grateful confidence raise thy "Ebenezer," for

> He who hath helped thee hitherto
> Will help thee all thy journey through.[1]

Before us lie the hills, sunlit with promise,
Fairer fulfilments than the past could know,
New growths of soul, new leadings of the Spirit
And all the glad surprises God will show.

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

Friendship.

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FRIENDSHIP.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.—2 Sam. i. 26.

WHEN the youthful David appeared before Saul after his duel with Goliath, he attracted the notice and won the heart of the king's eldest son. As he told his story with the winning modesty of a boy who has done a really brave thing as a matter of course and dislikes talking about it, we read that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." It was a sudden friendship. David was one of those divinely favoured natures that irresistibly attract every one they touch, and whose charm no one is able to withstand. The chivalrous nature of Jonathan fell at once under the spell of the heroic youth, introduced to him under circumstances so remarkable and so romantic. The sudden friendship was mutual and lasting. "Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul."

That friendship was soon severely tested. Jonathan had to choose between his own interests and those of his friend. He did not hesitate. The covenant was renewed with the distinct understanding on his part that David might, and probably would, come between him and the throne. The friends pledged themselves to stand by one another to death, and then they parted; for Saul's jealousy now threatened David's life and he was a fugitive. The sacred narrative is plainly a transcript from life. The friends have arranged a meeting in a secret place, and determined on a sign to indicate whether David must fly or not. Jonathan draws his famous bow and shoots an arrow beyond the "little lad" who is with him, and as the boy runs forward to

pick up the arrow, his master cries after him the words agreed upon as a message of danger, and as soon as the arrow has been recovered sends him away with his weapons. "And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the South, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, for ever."

Once more they met, and, so far as we know, only once. It was when Saul was pursuing David persistently but unsuccessfully. It is impossible to imagine a more difficult situation than that of Jonathan. Indignant at his father's obstinate injustice, unable to restrain his violence, he yet refused to desert him, and seems to have quietly exerted himself to protect his friend. For the third time the covenant was renewed. "Jonathan, Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant before the Lord." In the disastrous scene on Gilboa, Jonathan fought and fell by his father's side, and the suggestion of that fact is borne out by the emphasis laid on the union of the two in David's lament. Jonathan was a devoted son, as well as the most loyal of friends, and when he had to take sides in the final conflict, he stood by his misguided father. "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; . . . I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

The subject is Friendship. Let us consider—

I. The Marks of Friendship.
II. Its Value.
III. Its Place in Christianity.

I.

The Marks of Friendship.

1. There are not a great many friendships which have left an abiding record in human memories; but there is in legend the friendship of Theseus and Peirithous, of Orestes and Pylades, of Roland and Oliver on the borderland of legend and history; and in Jewish story this of David and Jonathan. The world's later ages do not furnish so readily as the earlier ages examples of a friendship between men heroic enough in force and beauty to make a mark on the human mind.

¶ Pythias was condemned to death by Dionysius the tyrant. He begged leave to go home to wish his friends good-bye and to arrange his affairs. He had a friend named Damon, who said, "Let him go, and I will remain in prison and die for him if he does not return." Dionysius consented, and Pythias went off home, and came back just in time to meet his fate, and save the friend who had risked death for his sake. The tyrant was so struck by the nobility of heart in the two men that he pardoned Pythias, and said: "Let me be a third person in so sacred a friendship."[1]

2. Still friendship remains a great good among human goods, and it is well that we should know the secret of it, and by what care and art it can be engendered and preserved and heightened. Therefore it will not be amiss to look at this old tale of how David and Jonathan loved one the other with a love, as the poet of them says, passing the love of women, in the hope that by looking at it we may recover some portion of that lost secret—how friends are made and kept. Most of us have friends; all of us wish for them. How may we make and keep them? Three things are necessary to a genuine and lasting friendship.

(1) *Spontaneousness.*—The love of Jonathan for David was a case of love at first sight. Jonathan had watched, as all Israel did, the unequal combat between the mailed giant and the shepherd; and he doubtless took a prominent part in the slaughter of the Philistines which followed the discomfiture of their champion. He was standing by, afterwards, when David, with

[1] S. Gregory.

modesty equal to his merit, gave Saul an account of his experience of God's faithfulness; and was so impressed by what he saw and heard that "it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

¶ You are to find something in your friend which will be complementary to your own nature. His tastes, his aptitudes, his thoughts, so dissimilar from your own, will all help to contribute to your wealth. His point of view will reveal many things you have failed to observe from yours. His habits of mind will pleasantly and helpfully react upon your own. If there is genuine equality of friendship and neither of you requires that the other should merge his individuality or sink his convictions in your own, the friendship cannot easily fail to be a blessing to you both. You remember the canto of *In Memoriam* which Tennyson addressed to his brother. He had said that his friend, Henry Hallam, was more to him than his brothers were; and then he wrote those beautiful verses—

"More than my brothers are to me,"—
Let this not vex thee, noble heart!
I know thee of what force thou art
To hold the costliest love in fee.

But thou and I are one in kind,
As moulded like in Nature's mint;
And hill and wood and field did print
The same sweet forms in either mind.

For us the same cold streamlet curl'd
Thro' all his eddying coves; the same
All winds that roam the twilight came
In whispers of the beauteous world.

At one dear knee we proffer'd vows,
One lesson from one book we learn'd
Ere childhood's flaxen ringlet turn'd
To black and brown on kindred brows.

And so my wealth resembles thine,
But he was rich where I was poor,
And he supplied my want the more
As his unlikeness fitted mine.

So it is, I think, in all the best friendships. David sought and found his closest friendship outside his own family; in one from whom he was severed by antagonism, and conflicting interests; and such friendship was true and unbroken.[1]

(2) *Disinterestedness.* — Jonathan was heir-apparent to the throne, but David had been anointed king by Samuel. The kingdom was to be taken from the house of Saul, and given to the house of David. Very naturally, the young prince Jonathan might have felt first envy, and then hatred of David, who was to supplant him; but instead of that, he said to him one day, very touchingly, "Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee." He meant to be his friend, and his helper, taking joy in seeing David wear the crown which might have adorned his own brow.

Contrast Jonathan's love with Eliab's suspicion and envy. Smarting under a consciousness of his inferiority in faith and courage to his young brother, Eliab taunted him with forsaking his duty, and coming away from the farm to enjoy the excitement of camp life. "I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." That is how his own mother's son greeted David. But the king's son loved him as his own soul.

¶ I have no great expectations of the permanence of a friendship that is sought definitely and distinctly for purposes of gain. Friendship that lasts is nearly always, I think, in its origin, disinterested. It is a spontaneous outgoing of the affection and sympathy towards some other personality. And I want you to remember that there are few burdens heavier to bear than the burden of thoughts, desires, hopes, sorrows, intentions, ideals, which we can share with no one because we have no friend in life to share them with. Lord Bacon warned us, in his striking way, against being "cannibals of our own hearts."[2]

¶ Friendship by its very nature consists in loving rather than in being loved. In other words, friendship consists in being a friend, not in having a friend.[3]

¶ "If I have not succeeded in my friendships," Thoreau says in his journal, "it was because I demanded more of them, and

[1] C. Silvester Horne, *Relationships of Life*, 133.
[2] C. Silvester Horne. [3] H. Clay Trumbull.

did not put up with what I could get; and I got no more partly because I gave so little.[1]

¶ By entering fully into the lives of others he freed himself from much of that painful self-consciousness which is the curse of a sensitive character. In proportion as his friendship was deep was his imagination penetrative into the characters of his friends, and that to such a degree that he took their lives into his own. And for all in whom he became interested, he was untiring in effort. He invented new plans for their lives, new interests, new pursuits. He sought ceaselessly for remedies for their trials, and means of escape from their perplexities. There never lived a truer friend.[2]

(3) *Loyalty.*—Jonathan clung to David through good report and through evil report. It might be alleged that when David had, at one bound, leaped into the first place in the affections of the people, it was politic for Jonathan to pose as his friend; or it might be urged that Jonathan allowed himself to be carried away by a rush of emotion, and that that was why he abdicated so readily in favour of David. But Jonathan loved David equally when he was in adversity. When king Saul had turned against David and was hunting him as a partridge on the mountains, then it was Jonathan's loyalty and courage that kept David from despairing. This is forcibly brought out in the incident at Keilah. David had done great things for the men of Keilah; for in obedience to God's command, but in defiance of all counsels of prudence, David had attacked the Philistines and delivered Keilah out of their hands. Before long, however, Saul came to take David prisoner, and the men of Keilah had agreed to give up their champion, and deliver him into the hands of Saul. So David fled and took refuge in the wilderness of Ziph. It was a time of sore darkness and trial, and David's faith was in danger of giving way. Now if David's faith had failed, Jonathan might have regained the succession to the throne. What, then, did Jonathan do? He went to visit his friend in adversity, and strengthened his hands in God. "Fear not, thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee." So on another occasion: "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee." Jonathan was loyal to the core.

[1] *Henry David Thoreau*, 113.

[2] S. A. Brooke, *Life and Letters of Frederick W. Robertson*, 187.

He that wrongs his friend
Wrongs himself more, and ever bears about
A silent court of justice in his breast,
Himself the judge and jury, and himself
The prisoner at the bar, ever condemned.[1]

¶ Robertson of Brighton in one of his letters (*Life and Letters*, 447) tells how a friend of his had, through cowardice or carelessness, missed an opportunity of putting him right on a point with which he was charged, and so left him defenceless against a slander. With his native sweetness of soul, he contents himself with the exclamation, "How rare is it to have a friend who will defend you thoroughly and boldly!" Yet that is just one of the loyal things a friend can do, sometimes when it would be impossible for a man himself to do himself justice with others. Some things, needful to be said or done under certain circumstances, cannot be undertaken without indelicacy by the person concerned, and the keen instinct of a friend should tell him that he is needed. A little thoughtfulness would often suggest things that could be done for our friends, that would make them feel that the tie which binds us to them is a real one.[2]

Brother and friend, the world is wide,
But I care not whether there be
The soothing song of a summer tide
Or the thrash of a wintry sea,
If but through shimmer and storm you bide
Brother and friend to me.

Brother and friend, the dear home days
Lie low on a fading shore;
But with buried fault and garnered praise
We look to the days before,
And bear in our hands o'er all life's ways
The best of the fruit they bore.

And never alone have I had to stand
To face what the fates might send,
Nor leaned for help in a weary land
On a reed that the winds might bend;
For my hand reached out till it grasped your hand
And held it—brother and friend.

So, as we tread life's hills of pain,
Its levels of common need,

[1] Tennyson. [2] Hugh Black, *Friendship*, 66.

Face its worst and best, find its loss and gain,
Let this stand in our creed:
We are each the other's—heart, hand, and brain—
By the love that is love indeed.

Brother and friend, the world is wide,
But I care not whether there be
The soothing song of a summer tide
Or the thrash of a wintry sea,
If but through shimmer and storm you bide
Brother and friend to me.[1]

II.

The Value of Friendship.

Lord Bacon reckons up the value of friendship in this way.

(1) It brings *Comfort.*—A friend may play the part of a confessor and bring the relief and moral strength which belong to that character. "No receipt openeth the heart but a true friend; to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart, to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession."

And then, dear friend, I thought of thee so lowly,
So unassuming, and so gently kind,
And lo! a peace, a calm serene and holy
Settled upon my mind.

Ah, friend, my friend! one true heart fond and tender,
That understands our troubles and our needs,
Brings us more near to God than all the splendour
And pomp of seeming worship and vain creeds.[2]

(2) It gives *Counsel.* — While friendship is balm to the wounded heart, it may also be light to the darkened understanding, and that not merely because a friend can give honest and wise counsel, but also because the mere act of talking to him clears up mental confusions, and gives clearness and consistence to thought. Friendship is the best antidote for self-conceit; for

[1] Percy C. Ainsworth, *Poems and Sonnets*, 26.
[2] Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

"there is no such flatterer as is a man's self; and there is no such remedy against flattery of a man's self, as the liberty of a friend."

¶ The candid friend has a proverbially evil name. But in such cases there is perhaps more candour than friendship. A true friend will not, if necessary, shrink from warning. "Any man," said Gladstone, "can stand up to his opponents: give me the man who can stand up to his friends." Such occasions, however, are happily rare. But friendship should certainly be a support to virtue, not an encouragement to vice.[1]

¶ It was Mr. Hamerton who said that the great loss of women is that they never hear the truth from men. Sir Arthur Helps has a passage to the same effect in his essay on "The Art of Living with Others." He comments on the evils caused by chivalry. He says that, however great the unreason which women talk out of doors, nobody could be brutal enough to tell them that it is nonsense. He thinks the intellect of women has been injured because it has been "petted." And he adds that if you put people on a pedestal and do a great deal of worship around them, the atmosphere is of insincerity and unreality. Now there is, undoubtedly, a large measure of truth in this; and we have to add that most women have come to demand admiration, not to say adulation, and that sort of artificial regard and deference which becomes an atmosphere in which the truth cannot live. I should be the last to deny the faults on the other side. Men too often regard the society of ladies as simply the opportunity for those light and graceful insincerities which cannot by any abuse of language be held to represent their real opinions. The idea seems to be that it would not be chivalrous to offend delicate sensibilities, and that to contradict a lady would be an offence against good form. Hence this species of feigned agreement—no genuine homage of the truth, but a very unworthy condescension to untruth. In this respect I do venture to think that we are mending our ways; and I suggest to you young men and women that you will be doing something well worth the doing if the men among you make a point of treating the intelligence of women with equal respect, and if the women among you take care to let it be known that you value friendship as an opportunity for an exchange of real thoughts and sincere sentiments, and that you demand no judgment for your own opinions but the honest, candid, open judgment of clear intelligence.[2]

[1] Lord Avebury, *Peace and Happiness*, 182. [2] C. Silvester Horne.

(3) It provides *Comradeship.* — A friend is the best of all comrades in the work and warfare of life, the most serviceable, the most trustworthy, the least likely to be deluded by irrelevant considerations. "A man cannot speak to his son, but as a father; to his wife, but as a husband; to his enemy, but upon terms; whereas a friend may speak, as the case requires, and not as it sorteth with the person."

Bacon's shrewd insight into average human life leads him in these concluding words to fall below the nobility of his theme. The father and the husband may add the character of the friend, and though this, perhaps, is not commonly attained, yet neither fatherhood nor the married state reaches its true altitude otherwise. Jeremy Taylor raised the question, "whether a friend may be more than a husband or wife," and he answered with equal truth and decision: "It can never be reasonable or just, prudent or lawful, but the reason is, because marriage is the queen of friendship, in which there is a communication of all that can be communicated by friendship; and it being made sacred by vows and love, by bodies and souls, by interest and custom, by religion and by laws, by common counsels and common fortunes; it is the principal in the kind of friendship, and the measure of all the rest."[1]

What is the best a friend can be
To any soul, to you or me?
Not only shelter, comfort, rest—
In most refreshment unexpressed;
Not only a beloved guide
To thread life's labyrinth at our side,
Or, with love's torch lead on before;
Though these be much, there yet is more.

The best friend is an atmosphere,
Warm with all inspirations dear,
Wherein we breathe the large free breath
Of life that has no taint of death.
Our friend is an unconscious part
Of every true beat of our heart;
A strength, a growth, whence we derive
God's health that keeps the world alive.

[1] H. H. Henson.

Can friend lose friend? Believe it not!
The tissue whereof life is wrought,
Weaving the separate into one,
No end hath, nor beginning; spun
From subtle threads of destiny
Finer than thought of man can see.
God takes not back His gifts divine;
While thy God lives, thy friend is thine.[1]

¶ Walt Whitman is the poet of comrades, and sings the song of companionship more than any other theme. He ever comes back to the lifelong love of comrades. The mystery and the beauty of it impressed him.

O tan-faced prairie-boy,
Before you came to camp came many a welcome gift,
Praises and presents came and nourishing food, till at last among the recruits
You came, taciturn, with nothing to give—we but looked on each other,
When lo! more than all the gifts of the world you gave me.

III.

The Place of Friendship in Christianity.

The accusation has not rarely been urged against the New Testament that it contains no precepts for the guidance of friends—nay, that friendship does not seem to be recognized by the sacred writers.

The truth is that friendship, the marriage of souls, is one of the ultimate facts of life, connected with an integral element of human nature itself, and that Christianity, the religion of the Incarnation, takes it for granted, and pours into it a wonderful treasure of purity, purpose, and permanence. Certainly we ought not to be astonished if we discover outside the Christian sphere splendid examples of all those virtues which are properly described as natural—conjugal love, patriotism, courage, friendship. What would be astonishing, and ought (did it indeed exist) to move in us the most profound perplexity and searching of heart,

[1] Lucy Larcom.

would be the absence or degradation within the Christian sphere of these natural virtues. Whatever is truly natural is necessarily Christian, the very witness of the Incarnation prohibits the notion that any natural excellence can be excluded from perfected humanity.

1. What was the secret which kept alive the friendship of David and Jonathan, in defiance of all that difficulty and danger, and family affection and duty, and most urgent self-interest could do to destroy it? The mere mutual liking of two gallant and generous young men, who had the same manly tastes and chivalrous sentiments, is not enough to explain it. The unsolderable spell which cemented this union of hearts was of no such stuff as that. The same passage which reminds us of what there was to imperil their friendship reveals also the secret of its safe keeping. Jonathan "arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." What is "strengthening his hand in God"? The expression is obscure, but its most natural meaning is that Jonathan heartened David in his danger and exile by reminding him of God's promise, and by declaring his own faith in it. That touches the true bond of this friendship. What bound these two together was not natural and congenial temper, but the sympathy of a common faith. Each saw in the other one priceless virtue—devotion to a holy ideal; each knew that the other lived faithful to a sacred purpose, an ambition which was pure. If Jonathan loved David, it was because David was true to a divinely appointed destiny and followed it unshaken through peril and pain and discouragements. If, in turn, David loved Jonathan, it was because he, too, saw in his friend a lofty and pathetic obedience to a fate which was a fate of deprivation and endurance and humiliation, but yet was the fate which God had chosen for him. They loved each other so well, and with such steadfastness, because they loved God yet more: their "loves in higher love endured." The glory that gathered upon their earthly affection was the glory which breathed upon it from a spiritual faith.

¶ Jonathan is a pious man as well as a righteous one. He believes the Lord's messages that He has chosen David to be king, and he submits; seeing that it is just and right, and that

David is worthy of the honour, though it be to the hurt of himself and of his children after him. It is the Lord's will; and he, instead of repining against it, must carry it out as far as he is concerned. Yes; those who are most true to their fellow-men are always those who are true to God; for the same spirit of God which makes them fear God makes them also love their neighbour.[1]

¶ Love is the only permanent relationship among men, and the permanence is not an accident of it, but is of its very essence. When released from the mere magnetism of sense, instead of ceasing to exist, it only then truly comes into its largest life. If our life were more a life in the spirit, we would be sure that death can be at the worst but the eclipse of friendship. Tennyson felt this truth in his own experience, and expressed it in noble form again and again in *In Memoriam*—

> Sweet human hand and lips and eye,
> Dear heavenly friend that canst not die;
>
> Strange friend, past, present, and to be;
> Loved deeplier, darklier understood;
> Behold, I dream a dream of good,
> And mingle all the world with thee.
>
> Thy voice is on the rolling air;
> I hear thee where the waters run;
> Thou standest in the rising sun,
> And in the setting thou art fair.

It is not loss, but a momentary eclipse, and the final issue is a clearer perception of immortal love, and a deeper consciousness of eternal life.[2]

2. Friendship was one of the noblest features of ancient life, and there are no worthier chapters of classical literature than those which record and discuss it; but will any thoughtful student of that literature deny that in two important particulars classic friendship tended to failure? It lacked security against sensual passion on the one hand, and on the other it lacked the moral exaltation which comes from the conviction of personal immortality.

¶ Once let friendship be given that is born of God, nor time nor circumstance can change it to a lessening; it must be mutual growth, increasing trust, widening faith, enduring patience, for-

[1] C. Kingsley. [2] Hugh Black, *Friendship*, 113.

giving love, unselfish ambition—an affection built before the Throne, that will bear the test of time and trial.[1]

¶ David Lyall, in *The Land o' the Leal*, referring to the long and healthful influence of the old schoolmaster, so dear to the whole countryside, talks in this strain: "God grant, then, that Adam Fairweather be long spared, for on the day that we carry him down the brae to the kirkyard, a sweet savour will be lost to Faulds, which could never be restored." I should be very sorry to quarrel with so sweet a soul, so choice a spirit as David Lyall. Happily there is no cause. Still, I want to propound a doctrine that is to me a source of unfailing comfort. It may be variously stated and illustrated. First, there are those, God increase their number! whom no man, no army of men, could carry "down the brae to the kirkyard." Next, "a sweet savour" cannot be lost: it abides to cheer, to solace, to sustain. Thus is it with the lamp of friendship: the lamp may be broken, yet the light shines on undimmed. Yes, it shines with even greater lustre when distance separates or death divides. Separation should not interfere with the shining of this lamp. Especially does this hold good of our crowned and glorified friends. I was going to say I had a friend, rather let me say I have a friend, even though he has passed beyond the veil. He is not now in the flesh, but his influence abides, and, as the days roll by, grows in power. In the old days his thoughts inspired, his words charmed, and his actions allured into nobler paths; but to-day, in the absorbing now, he is still a force in my life. I have not yet seen the sexton that could dig a grave deep enough to bury him. Such an one continues to live, and to yield the sweet aroma of his influence, and so enlarges our indebtedness.[2]

There is no friend of mine
Laid in the grave to sleep;
No grave, or green, or heaped afresh,
By which I stand and weep.

Who died! What means that word
Of men so much abhorred?
Caught up in clouds of heaven, to be
For ever with the Lord.

Thank God! for all my loved,
That out of pain and care
Have safely reached the heavenly heights,
And stay to meet me there.

[1] Allan Throckmorton. [2] I. O. Stalberg.

3. Our Divine Master Himself stands in the historic category of friendship. Nothing less than friendship, in the deep, hallowed, exclusive sense which we are wont to give the word, could authorize, as nothing less could satisfy, the sublimely simple description of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," by which, in his Gospel, St. John at once conceals his name and confesses his identity. Our Master also felt drawn to some men more than to others, though He loved all. Of that young ruler who ran to Him with eager impulsiveness to offer allegiance, and yet made the great refusal when the stern conditions of allegiance were disclosed, we read that "Jesus looking upon him loved him"; and it is on record elsewhere in the Gospel that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

¶ Cardinal Newman, in his beautiful sermon on "Love of Relations and Friends," remarks on the apparent strangeness of the fact that the Son of God should have thus "had a private friend." "This shows us," he says, "first, how entirely He was a man, as much as any of us, in His wants and feelings; and next, that there is nothing contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, nothing inconsistent with the fulness of Christian love, in having our affections directed in an especial way towards certain objects, towards those whom the circumstances of our past life, or some peculiarities of character, have endeared to us."

¶ The whole subject of friendship makes clear to us the relationship we should hold to Jesus Christ. The only perfect friendship is a friendship that is inward and spiritual; but in imperfect and feeble natures like ours the varieties and degrees of friendship are endless. There is only one Being on whose love we may count without fail. It is not every one with whom we can hold fellowship. There are minds and lives with which we cannot have any free and intimate intercourse. There seems to be nothing in common between them and us. They are too high, too self-absorbed, they move in an orbit far removed from the range of our small careers. It is only a certain order of mind that can have close friendship with men like Plato and Spinoza and Hegel. The world in which these wise men live is not the same as that in which the majority of us think and toil. It is only trained scientific minds that can keep company with Newton and Darwin and Kelvin. We read Cromwell's letters, and Wellington's dispatches, but, somehow, while we feel these men are human like ourselves, their dealings are mainly with politicians and administrators and military leaders. Dante and Shakespeare

and Milton are for imaginative natures; Gibbon and Macaulay and Lecky and Mommsen for those whose interest lies in tracing the rise and fall and growth and power of nationalities. These great minds are not companions for every one. They have their circle and school. Their empire does not cover humanity. There is only one, Jesus Christ, who offers His heart to all, be they what they may. With Him all may be in friendship.[1]

¶ The last words of President Edwards, after bidding his weeping relatives good-bye, were: "Now where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing Friend?" So saying he fell asleep.

4. We must, as Christians, bring our friendships under the yoke of Christ, and make them instruments of righteousness; we may not safely indulge the merely natural attraction which drew us first together. There must follow the "covenant" of mutual service and sacrifice. When the generous prince felt his heart go out to the young hero standing before his father's throne, and when he gave place to his love and bound himself by the eager vows and protestations of friendship in its first enthusiasm, he little guessed the demands which that friendship would make on him, he little thought that his love for David would have to stand the strain of so many strange and disastrous contingencies. But from the first it was a consecrated thing between the young men, and at every fresh crisis of trouble, they renewed their "covenant before the Lord." And even now, across those dim wastes of time, we can see how that consecrated friendship blessed them both. Jonathan, the bold, eager, heroic warrior, was softened and hallowed by his love for David, and grew into the noblest and most winning heroism of history by the discipline of that stern, exacting obligation which he had taken on himself in youth; and David, the gay, all-prospering, ambitious man, was lifted into chivalry and melted into tenderness by the spectacle of so much generosity, and such enduring love.

What might be done if men were wise—
What glorious deeds, my suffering brother,
Would they unite
In love and right,
And cease their scorn of one another.

[1] W. Watson, *A Young Man's Ideal*, 63.

Oppression's heart might be imbued
With kindling drops of loving-kindness,
And knowledge pour
From shore to shore
Light on the eyes of mental blindness.

All slavery, warfare, lies, and wrongs,
All vice and crime might die together,
And wine and corn
To each man born
Be free as warmth in summer weather.

The meanest wretch that ever trod,
The deepest sunk in sin and sorrow,
Might stand erect
In self-respect
And share the teeming world to-morrow.

What might be done? This might be done,
And more than this—my suffering brother!
More than the tongue
E'er said or sung,
If men were wise, and loved each other!

Thou art the Man.

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THOU ART THE MAN.

And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.—2 Sam. xii. 7.

1. THE literature of the world probably contains no more pitiably human story than the story of David's great sin. The man who can gloat over it with heated passion is an animal; the man who can laugh at it with malicious cynicism is a fiend. It is one of those sad and lamentable stories which make us ashamed of our passions, which make us feel a sort of degradation in the possession of powers which can be potent with such infernal mischief, and can lead to such foul and tragic consequences. As we read the story we are ashamed of human nature, and it is not difficult to despair of it. "If," we say, "the sweet singer of Israel, a man so true, so valiant, so heroically manly, could fall so deeply, who is safe in the presence of temptation?" One can readily understand how such a story as this might fascinate and terrify a sensitive nature, till the only way of escape seemed celibacy, and the only true method of life a monastic isolation from temptation.[1]

2. It is in the previous chapter that we read, in the stern, pure, outspokenness of the Bible, how David fell. Here was the man who had been so wonderfully blest by God, who had done so much for God, who had come to know so much of God. Only four chapters before we find this same man "sitting before the Lord" in calm, deep, enraptured thanksgiving; he has just heard through Nathan that, though he is not to build the Temple, he is to be the forefather of the Lord's Christ. The Hope of Israel, when at last He comes, is to be David's Son. He to whom, according to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, David could look up, "in the Spirit," and call Him "my Lord," was yet to be his actual

[1] W. J. Dawson.

Descendant and Successor "according to the flesh." There, in 2 Sam. vii., we find David telling over to his God all his wonder and all his joy, basking in the sunshine of the great Promise, reposing in the mighty Hope. Here, in 2 Sam. xi., we find David, on a sudden, fallen, fallen. Satan has him in the snare. He has lusted with his eyes. He has committed a base adultery. In the sequel, in a course of flagrant treachery to a devoted retainer, the husband so awfully injured, David has compassed a brave man's death. He is a murderer. And for many months after the first great act of sin—yes, even till the child of his guilt has been born—we gather that he has hardened his heart against conviction. For not till Nathan spoke to his conscience does he appear to have said one word of penitence to God.

3. The Bible is very frank. It conceals, it extenuates nothing. It shows us the defects as well as the virtues in the noblest characters. It depicts none moving on heights of impossible perfection; and by that very fact, by the manifest humanness of its purest, grandest heroes; by the calm, terrible truthfulness of their falls into sin, as here recorded, the divineness of this Book is brought home to our consciousness, and it lays a larger, firmer, and more salutary hold upon universal man. Abraham by his faith, Moses by his meekness, Job by his patience, seem to rise above us in superhuman excellence. But when we read of Abraham's falsehoods, Moses' petulance, Job's impatience, they each come nearer to us, and say, as did Peter to Cornelius in a later day, "Stand up; I myself also am a man."

¶ If King David had lived in a period of what is called "secular" history, and in a time and country upon which modern religious or political prejudices could have been brought to bear, we may form some idea how his life would have been treated by historians. Books would have been written to extol him to the skies: books would also have been written to prove him a consistent hypocrite. On the one hand, his crimes would have been ignored, or palliated by the alleged necessities of policy; on the other, they would have formed the chief topic of the writer's eloquence, and we should have been asked to withhold common respect from the man who could deal as David dealt by Uriah the Hittite. Partisans would rise on both sides of the question, and men who had not the means or the power of forming an opinion would ask, "What is truth?" Nay, they

might even ask the question—more dangerous still to leave unanswered—"What are right and wrong?" He would have fared as Mary Stuart or Cromwell have fared. If David had had his Lingard, he would also have had his Froude.[1]

4. The story of David possesses a fascination which is not equalled even by that of St. Paul. This is due in some degree to the Book of Psalms, which furnishes the simplest and most complete devotional exemplar that we possess. It is due, also, no doubt, to the idyllic beauty of the shepherd's earliest story —to the romantic adventures of the patriot—to the absorbing interest which attaches to the events of the whole reign. But men prize and love the story of David for other reasons than these. They find in it the picture of their own struggles in their humbler field. They learn from David's weakness and transgressions that he is one with themselves. When he abhors himself in dust and ashes, they are reminded that they, too, have need of purification; but that it should not prevent their returning to the conflict, for God will receive and bless them again. They do not feel the inconsistency which unbelievers point to in David, with the sneering question, "Is this the man after God's own heart?" They feel rather that were it not for these inconsistencies David would be unlike them, and his story no pattern of theirs. They know that when they yield to God, they do righteous acts and are righteous: that when they yield to self they are unrighteous, and are the servants of an evil power. They know they are inconsistent, but they know God loves them, and their faith is sure. They have tried to balance their state before God, but have ceased from the task sick at heart and unsatisfied. They know that if their life were recorded truly, it would consist of acts unreconciled, unreconcilable, even as David's acts. But God is their helper, and to Him, not to man, do they look for pardon and for justification.

We have to trace the history of a sin. There are three stages—

I. Self-Indulgence.
II. Self-Deception.
III. Self-Discovery.

[1] A. Ainger.

I.

Self-Indulgence.

The period which went before the fall was for David one of unbounded outward prosperity. He was rapidly becoming lord paramount of a vast region outside the Promised Land; Moab, Zobah, Damascus, Hamath—all had fallen before his forces. Here already was, of course, temptation. Success indeed was not sin; nay, we read that "*the Lord* preserved him." But success was test, and it was allurement too. And surely we see allurement beginning to do its evil work, in that short sentence of xi. 1, "But David tarried still at Jerusalem." A subtle slothfulness was creeping into the life of the hero-king. He was beginning to affect the Sultan rather than the devoted leader of other days. Just then it was that, "in an eveningtide David arose from off his bed," from off the couch of a siesta prolonged far beyond its time, and "walked (not with God) upon the roof." Then did Satan "find mischief for idle *eyes*," and David fell, steep after steep, into that awful "quag upon the left hand of the road" of life.[1]

¶ When Christian passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, he found that "on the left hand, there was a very dangerous Quag, into which, if even a good man falls, he finds no bottom for his foot to stand on. Into that Quag King David once did fall, and had no doubt therein been smothered, had not He that is able pluckt him out."

¶ In one form or another an ineradicable instinct has prompted Christians in all times to free themselves from luxurious and self-indulgent ways of living; to walk as disciples of Him who had "not where to lay his head"; to lay aside, not only every sin, but every weight, that so they may run the race set before them, not as beating the air, but as those that strive for the victory.

It is, indeed, not easy to define the precise kind or amount of luxury which is compatible with Christian simplicity; or rather, it must of necessity vary. But the principle is, I think, clear. In life, as in art, whatever does not help, hinders. All that is superfluous to the main object of life must be cleared away, if that object is to be fully attained. In all kinds of effort, whether moral, intellectual, or physical, the essential condition of vigour is

[1] H. C. G. Moule.

a severe pruning away of redundance. Is it likely that the highest life, the life of the Christian body, can be carried on upon easier terms?[1]

1. David's self-indulgence was simply selfishness in one of its forms. Now, just as unselfishness is the true triumph of life, so selfishness is the degradation of life, and is the secret of its failure. Reduce sin to its primal elements, and the last result is always selfishness. Begin where you will among those common and well-known sins and defects of habit, whose nature is perfectly ascertainable by sad experience and bitter knowledge, and see if this is not true.

> Lo! from that idol of self another idol is born.
> The idol of self is the mother of all idols;
> Those are the snakes, but this is the dragon;
> Self is the flint and steel, and the idol is the spark;
> The spark indeed may be quenched by water,
> But how shall water quench the flint and steel?[2]

Take, for instance, temper. That is a common sin enough. There are thousands of households wrecked by the ungovernable irritability of an individual. He cannot restrain his tongue. The slightest provocation produces an explosion. Then follows a torrent of bitter, biting, sarcastic words, which fill the air like a cloud of poisoned arrows, and rankle in the wounded heart long after the careless archer has gone upon his way and forgotten them. We may explain the phenomenon by euphemistic talk about a hasty nature, or the irritability of genius, or what we will; but the real root of it lies in the unregenerate selfishness of the man's nature. Because passionate sarcasm is a momentary relief to his nervous irritation, he indulges in it. The essence of unselfishness is to realize what another feels, to interpret his needs, to share his thoughts by the revealing power of sympathy, to be able instinctively to understand what will wound or grieve, and to exercise a severe self-repression in order to avoid it. But the angry man has no such realization of the nature of others, and cannot understand the havoc which his hasty words produce.

[1] Caroline Emelia Stephen. [2] Jalaluddin Rumi.

¶ One of Bishop Moberly's daughters is said to have had the rare gift of a charm which was indefinable, and this "in spite of great fits of wrath, considered by herself to be merely 'righteous indignation,' which upset the house from time to time."[1]

¶ January 18th. You will be surprised, knowing my old bad ways, to hear that I have not once, to the best of my memory, since February, been out of temper with the servants in my old fashion. Perhaps one reason of this is, that I am more indifferent about things now than I used to be when your comfort depended upon them, but still, I think that through God's grace I have, in measure, overcome that sin and habit of impatience which has always been such a cross to me.[2]

2. That is one lesson to learn from David's sin. Another is what may be called the accumulative way with sin. David looked, and the look was sin. And that one sin opened the way for many. To lust he added craft, to craft treason, to treason murder.

3. And a third lesson is the need of watchfulness. "Be sober, be vigilant." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." If the Lord gives us to drink the cup of earthly success, earthly ease, wealth, position, power—if He gives it—let us not be afraid to take it. But let us drink it always upon our knees, and always in His presence. Then it may mean for us the gift of a noble opportunity for Him. Otherwise we may find, in some easy, dreadful hour, that all our fancied moral strength is as dust in the wind before the blast of temptation, and that position, culture, intellect—nay, *past* spiritual experience itself — may only precipitate the unwatchful spirit's fall into "the quag on the left hand."

O soul! however sweet
The goal to which I hasten with swift feet—
If just within my grasp,
I reach, and joy to clasp,
And find there one whose body I must make
A footstool for that sake,
Though ever and for evermore denied,
Grant me to turn aside!

[1] C. A. E. Moberly, *Dulce Domum*, 160.
[2] Sir John Field, *Jottings from an Indian Journal*, 104.

O howsoever dear
The love I long for, seek, and find anear—
So near, so dear, the bliss
Sweetest of all that is,
If I must win by treachery or art,
Or wrong one other heart,
Though it should bring me death, my soul, that day
Grant me to turn away!

That in the life so far
And yet so near, I be without a scar
Of wounds dealt others; greet with lifted eyes
The pure of Paradise!
So I may never know
The agony of tears I caused to flow![1]

II.

Self-Deception.

1. The thing that strikes us most forcibly as we read Nathan's parable is the blindness and infatuation of the king to have missed the application of it. It seems an almost impossible state of self-deception which could let him flare out in indignant virtue against the supposed culprit, and never once dream that the case could apply to himself. Strange as the contradiction seems, it is common enough. When our passions and prejudices are not concerned, we can judge dispassionately; but in a case in which we are personally involved, we make the worse appear the better reason. We find means to justify it to ourselves in some fashion, and soothe our conscience to sleep. Till we come to the bar naked, without veils and excuses and palliations, as David was tricked into doing, we never do justice against ourselves.

¶ It is really prodigious to see a man, before so remarkable for virtue and piety, going on deliberately from adultery to murder, with the same cool contrivance, and, from what appears, with as little disturbance, as a man would endeavour to prevent the ill consequences of a mistake he had made in any common matter. That total insensibility of mind with respect to those horrid crimes, after the commission of them, manifestly shows

[1] Ina Donna Coolbrith.

that he did some way or other delude himself: and this could not be with respect to the crimes themselves, they were so manifestly of the grossest kind. What the particular circumstances were, with which he extenuated them, and quieted and deceived himself, is not related.[1]

2. How is it that, like David, we succeed so well in deceiving ourselves and in keeping up the deception so long?

(1) We usually begin by recognizing our sin, but proceed to make excuse for it. We blame circumstances, our outward environment, bad example, the temptations of our lot, opportunity ("O opportunity, thy guilt is great!" Shakespeare makes Tarquin say in self-excuse, after he had made the opportunity). If we are scientifically inclined we speak of heredity; if theologically inclined we speak of original sin and the guilt of Adam's first transgression.

¶ May we say that, while all characters are liable to the snare of self-deception, those are more particularly exposed to it who, like St. Peter and David, are persons of keen sensibilities, warm temperaments, quick affections? Probably we may; for affectionateness of disposition readily commends itself to the conscience as a thing which cannot be wrong, and secretly whispers to one who is conscious of possessing it, "This generous trait in you will cover and excuse many sins." An acrid, soured character cannot flatter itself that it is right with half the facility of a warm and genial character. A man who sins by passions the reverse of malignant is apt to thank God secretly that he is not malignant, totally forgetting that, although not malignant, he follows his impulses as entirely, and so is as purely selfish, as the malignant man.[2]

¶ A prisoner, in a recent trial, pleaded as an excuse, "an uncontrollable impulse," but the judge smartly replied that an uncontrollable impulse was simply an impulse uncontrolled.

(2) Habit gradually familiarizes us with evil, and diminishes our sense of it as evil. A man who has been for half a day in some ill-ventilated room does not notice the poisonous atmosphere; if you go into it you are half suffocated at first, and breathe more easily as you get used to it. A man can live amidst the foulest poison of evil; and, as the Styrian peasants get fat

[1] Joseph Butler, *Sermons*, 131 (Bernard's edition).
[2] E. M. Goulburn.

upon arsenic, his whole nature may seem to thrive by the poison that it absorbs. They tell us that the breed of fish that live in the lightless caverns in the bowels of some mountains, by long disuse have had their eyes atrophied, and are blind because they have lived out of the light. And so men that live in the love of evil lose the capacity of discerning the evil, and "he that walketh in darkness" becomes blind, blind to his sin, and blind to all the realities of life.

¶ There is in unresisted evil a dreadful power to stupefy the moral sense. If we thrust our hand rapidly first into hot water and then into cold, and do so many times, we are presently unable to detect which is hot and which is cold. The sensitive nerve grows callous, and its discernment is destroyed. So a man may experiment with sin till he feels no instinctive recoil from its abiding horror. The moral sense is like some delicate and sensitive instrument, which indicates with perfect accuracy the tendencies of conduct so long as it is untampered with; but once wronged, its power is gone. It is like putting the clock back because we do not wish to know the hour; the clock goes on working, but henceforth all its results are wrong. So the moral sense still works, but it strikes the wrong hour. It tells us what we want to hear, not what we need to hear, and what we know is true.[1]

(3) We are careful now not to examine ourselves too scrupulously. We avoid questions as to the moral nature of our conduct. We may have suspicions about it, but our method is usually, like David's, to try to forget, by leaving it out of account, by covering it over as if we were done with it. We have laid it like an uneasy ghost, and turned the key on it. But the murder will out some day. If not now, the disclosure will be made, and we will at last see ourselves as we are. "There is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed, or covered that shall not be made known."

(4) Or we nod assent to a general statement of right and wrong, accept principles, even give our unbiased judgment on concrete cases that are mentioned; and yet never make the personal application. It was not rhetoric but a deep knowledge of the heart of man that inspired St. Paul's great passage in which he drove home to the Jews that they were guilty of the same

[1] W. J. Dawson.

moral failure as they charged the Gentiles with: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the *same things*. . . . Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that makest thy boast of law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?"

¶ None of us would, I suppose, venture in plain words to stand up and say: "I am an exception to your general confessions of sin," and most of us would be ready to unite in the acknowledgment: we have all "come short of the glory of God," though in our consciences there has never stirred the faintest movements of self-condemnation even whilst our lips have been uttering the confession. Do not shrink away in the crowd, my brother! Come out to the front, and stand by yourself as God sees you, isolated. Look at your own actions; never mind about other men's. Do not content yourselves with saying, "*We* have sinned"; say, "*I* have sinned against *Thee*." God and you are as if alone in the universe. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." There are no crowds in God's eyes; He deals with single souls. Every one of us—thou, and thou, and thou—must give account of himself to God.[1]

(5) But the most successful method of self-deception is to condemn heartily the sins of other men. If a man's own sin is held up before him a little disguised, he says, "How ugly it is!" And if only for a moment he can be persuaded that it is not his own conduct but some other sinner's that he is judging, the instinctive condemnation comes. We have two sets of names for vices: one set which rather mitigates and excuses them, and another set which puts them in their real hideousness. We keep the palliative set for home consumption, and liberally distribute the plain-spoken ugly set amongst the vices and faults of our friends. The thing which I call in myself prudence I call in you meanness. The thing which you call in yourself generous living, you call in your friend filthy sensualism. That which, to the doer of it, is only righteous indignation, to the onlooker is passionate anger. That which, in the practiser of it, is no more

[1] A. Maclaren.

than a due regard for the interests of his own family and himself in the future, is to the envious lookers-on shabbiness and meanness in money matters. That which, to the liar, is only prudent, diplomatic reticence, to the listener is falsehood. That which, in the man that judges his own conduct, is but "a choleric word," is, in his friend, when he judges him, "flat blasphemy."

¶ It is always a sign of lack of knowledge of our own hearts when we judge self leniently and judge others censoriously. A painter, who was noted as a savage critic of other artists, when asked how he could ever pass any of his own work when he had such a keen critical standard, frankly declared: "I have only two eyes when I look at my own work, but am argus-eyed, have a hundred eyes, when I look at the work of others." This candid admission states the case in more things than artistic criticism.[1]

¶ It may have been during the time of his undetected sin that David was summoned by Joab to Rabbah that the honour might accrue to him of capturing the city and closing the campaign against the Ammonites. It was most likely during that dark period of David's life. He went, glad to escape himself, if he might, amid the excitements of battle. He took the city. The splendid jewelled crown of the Ammonitish king was put upon his head. And with sharpest vengeance he punished the vanquished people with death. Doubtless they had been marked by notorious cruelty. But that he should torture them—"put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and make them pass through the brick-kiln"—shows a mind lost to magnanimity, full of unrest, and eager any way to escape from itself. Futile attempt! "The mind is its own place." So the poor self-deceived king played his part. He seemed the very embodiment of rigorous justice against the enemy, and yet had been enacting a mean, pitiless, vile tragedy against one of the most valiant of his soldiers in that war.[2]

Jack Barrett went to Quetta,
  Because they told him to.
He left his wife at Simla
  On three-fourths his monthly screw:
Jack Barrett died at Quetta
  Ere the next month's pay he drew.

[1] H. Black. [2] G. T. Coster.

Jack Barrett went to Quetta,
He didn't understand
The reason of his transfer
From the pleasant mountain-land:
The season was September,
And it killed him out of hand.

Jack Barrett went to Quetta
And there gave up the ghost,
Attempting two men's duty
In that very healthy post;
And Mrs. Barrett mourned for him
Five lively months at most.

Jack Barrett's bones at Quetta
Enjoy profound repose;
But I shouldn't be astonished
If *now* his spirit knows
The reason of his transfer
From the Himalayan snows.

And, when the Last Great Bugle Call
Adown the Hurnai throbs,
When the last grim joke is entered
In the big black Books of Jobs,
And Quetta's graveyards give again
Their victims to the air,
I shouldn't like to be the man
Who sent Jack Barrett there.[1]

III.

Self-Discovery.

1. The story of Nathan's interview with David moves us with the pain and the pity of it. There is incomparable drama in the sudden turning of the tables, not the artificial drama of the stage, but the terrible drama of life, unmasking the feelings and motives of the heart, and touching the simple principles of justice that lie dormant in human nature. A year had passed since David's sin, and he had been able by some of the subtleties of self-excuse to dismiss it from his mind, till in this graphic way the prophet

[1] Rudyard Kipling, *Departmental Ditties*.

wakens his sleeping conscience, touching the sore place till it throbs with pain.

2. How true and striking this aspect of our subject is our own experience testifies. Watch how angry David grows as Nathan's story is told. He is the very incarnation of indignant justice. He is absolutely eager to punish the selfish scoundrel who has injured the poor man. The spoiler eager to punish the spoliator? The villain burning with a fine sense of angry justice against the lesser villain? It is even so. We can pluck out the mote from our brother's eye, and be utterly regardless of the beam in our own. We can pass sentence and applaud judgment on the cruelty of another, but our own cruelty we do not even perceive. It is not until some prophet focuses the light of judgment on our act, and puts before us what such sins as ours work in other spheres and other lives; it is not until we see our ungovernable temper reflected in the awful spectacle of the man upon the gallows, whose passion has carried him just a point beyond our own; till we see our self-indulgence vividly illustrated in some broken drunkard shambling down to his obscure and shameful grave; till our solitary carnality takes a living, leprous shape and form in the corroding vice which poisons all the world with its reek of horror; till our individual impurity stands typified in the wasted face of some wronged and shameful woman, lifted towards us in dumb reproach beneath the city gas-light;—it is not until this happens that the real truth about ourselves flashes on us, and the cry of Nathan, "Thou art the man!" terrifies us with its heart-searching accusation.

3. This self-discovery is made to a man's conscience. For in our own conscience there is still a Divine supremacy. What was it that made Nathan so fearless? Why was it that the king quailed before his subject, whose life was altogether in his hand? We know well why it was. It is the ancient spectacle, repeated in precise form when Elijah stops the chariot of Ahab, and John denounces Herod to his face, and John Knox thunders in the court of Mary Stuart. We know that "conscience doth make cowards of us all." We know that a man standing on the right is mightier than kings, and that kinghood is impotent before such

a man when kinghood is defiled. It was a pure conscience that animated Nathan with dignity, and clothed him with a Divine royalty; it was an evil conscience that made David cower and tremble before his servant like a beaten hound.

¶ There is a Northern legend, told in the proem of one of Hall Caine's books, of a man who thought he was pursued by a monster. His ricks were fired, his barns unroofed, his cattle destroyed, his lands blasted, his first-born slain. So he lay in wait for the monster where it lived in the chasms near his house, and in the darkness of night he saw it. With a cry he rushed upon it, and gripped it about the waist, and it turned upon him, and held him by the shoulder. Long he wrestled with it, reeling, staggering, falling and rising again; but at length a flood of strength came to him, and he overthrew it, and stood over it, covering it, conquering it, with its back against his thigh, and his hand set hard at its throat. Then he drew his knife to kill it; and the moon shot through a wrack of cloud, opening an alley of light about it, and he saw its face, and lo, the face of the monster was *his own.*

4. The self-discovery is made by the hand of God. We need another than our own voice to lay down the law of conduct, and to accuse and condemn the breaches of it. Conscience is not a wholly reliable guide, and is neither an impartial nor an all-knowing judge. Unconsciousness of evil is not innocence. It is not the purest of women who "wipes her mouth and says, I have done no harm." My conscience says to me, "It is wrong to do wrong"; but when I say to my conscience, "Yes, and pray what is wrong?" a large variety of answers is possible. A man may sophisticate his conscience, or bribe his conscience, or throttle his conscience, or sear his conscience. And so the man who is worst, who, therefore, ought to be most chastised by his conscience, has most immunity from it; and where, if it is to be of use, it ought to be most powerful, there it is weakest.

Until we make Christ our conscience, bringing everything to be judged by the Light, we shall keep confusing the issues, and disguising our sins, and finding all manner of self-escape, excuses, and counter-charges. But if we will have the same mind in us that was in Christ, looking at the world and life and self with His eyes, we shall see ourselves as we are; and when conscience says to us, in unmistakable tones, "Thou art the man," our one prayer

will not be self-justification, but: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

5. And this self-discovery is essential. We have no standing in the spiritual world till we see ourselves *as we are*. We cannot go on for ever refusing to face up to the facts, refusing to lay bare to ourselves what we fear to be there; like a spendthrift who will not look into his affairs till the crash comes, and excuses himself that he did not know that he had gone so far into debt, and is surprised to find his affairs in such a bad way. The excuse is not valid; for the reason why he did not look into his affairs was because he knew that they were not right, and was afraid to find out. So, in religion, men fear to uncover their hearts to themselves, because they are afraid of what they will find there. Their judgment would be David's judgment on the rich neighbour of the parable; but they, like David, will not make the application. We are all right on the general principles of religion, but personal religion begins exactly where we leave off.

¶ Rigorous self-judgment is the first requisite of the moral life—to turn the light in on self. Socrates made self-knowledge the basis of all knowledge. A deeper self-knowledge still is the very beginning of all personal religion. Sanctification is only a name till we translate the general into the particular, and apply to ourselves the demands of the law. We need to cease to talk about sin in the mass and come to details, and deal with the specific sins, and unmask them. Many religious people are worms of the earth, with their whole nature corrupt in their general confession, and very fine gentlemen in detail—never dealing with self in any direct fashion, never hearing once the searching word, "Thou art the man."[1]

[1] H. Black.

Repentance and Retribution.

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Repentance and Retribution.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.—2 Sam. xii. 13, 14.

1. David has been triumphant as a monarch. And not only has he been triumphant as a monarch; his private designs also have been crowned with success. At this very moment he is enjoying the fruits of a secret and cherished project which was carefully planned and has been prosperously executed. An object very near to his heart has been attained. The risks were great, but they have been surmounted. Obstacles have been removed; publicity has been avoided; no scandal has been created. Uriah has been slain fighting valiantly in the hottest of the battle; and Uriah's wife has become the wife of David.

2. At this crisis, when success culminates and satisfaction is complete, the blow comes. His tower of pride is crumbled into dust by some unseen hand. Henceforth he is a changed man. He is no more light-hearted and joyous and hopeful. He has tangled a coil of difficulties about him, from which he can never again extricate himself. He has loaded himself with a burden of sorrow under which he must stagger through life, only to bury it finally in the grave. Troubles gather thick upon him, troubles the most acute and numbing—gross crimes and irregularities in his own family, the rebellion of his sons, even of a favourite son, annoyances and perplexities and trials of all kinds. He has placed himself at the mercy of an unscrupulous and arrogant relative—the agent in his stratagem and the master of his secret. Everything goes wrong henceforth. From this time onward "the sword never departs from his house."

3. And yet, at this very moment, when the greatness of the crisis is revealed to him, his thoughts do not turn to any of these things. Not the gathering storm-cloud, not the fatal ascendancy of Joab, not the existence of a perilous secret, not the loss of respect and of power—not any of the thousand perplexities and troubles in which this one act may involve him rises up before him now. One thought dominates his soul. He remembers only One, whom he has grieved and alienated, One who is invisible and yet very present, One—this is the terrible thought which overwhelms and crushes him—One who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord."

I.

Penitence.

"I have sinned against the Lord."

1. What a Divine simplicity there is in the words of the text: "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord." That is all. In the original, two words are enough to revolutionize the man's whole life, and to alter all his relations to the Divine justice and the Divine Friend. "I have sinned against the Lord"—not an easy thing to say; and, as the story shows, a thing that David took a long time to mount up to.

Remember the narrative. A year has passed since his transgression. What sort of a year has it been? One of the Psalms tells us—"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." There were long months of sullen silence, in which a clear apprehension and a torturing experience of Divine disapprobation, like a serpent's fang, struck poison into his veins. His very physical frame seems to have suffered. His heart was as dry as the parched grass upon the steppes. That was what he got by his sin. A moment of turbid animal delight, and long days of agony, dumb suffering in which the sense of evil had not yet broken him down into a rain of sweet tears, but lay, like a burning consciousness, within his heart.

And then came the prophet with his parable, so tender, so ingenious, so powerful. And the quick flash of generous indignation, which showed how noble the man was after all, with which he responded to the picture, unknowing that it was a picture of his own dastardly conduct, led to the solemn words in which Nathan tore away the veil.

2. "I have sinned." Similar words were uttered by Pharaoh (Ex. ix. 27); Balaam (Num. xxii. 34); Achan (Josh. vii. 20); Saul (1 Sam. xv. 24–30); and the Prodigal Son (Luke xv. 18).

(1) *Pharaoh.*—Pharaoh uttered these words as a plea for mercy. He merely wanted to escape the punishment incurred by his guilt. His mock repentance was worse than nothing, for he became hardened, and rushed on in impenitence to his doom.

(2) *Balaam.*—In greedy haste after the promised riches, and when stopped by an angel, Balaam said, "I have sinned"; but his heart was set on "the rewards of divination," and he went on in his sin, perishing at last, hardened and impenitent, an example of an insincere repentance.

(3) *Achan.*—Achan confessed on compulsion, when found out. His trouble was, not that he had sinned, but that he had been detected.

(4) *Saul.*—Saul, king of Israel, said the same words to Samuel, but they were forced from him only after many vain excuses; and so, as the result shows, were no sign of a lasting repentance. His confession only worked despair, madness, and suicide—an example of the sorrow that "worketh death" (2 Cor. vii. 10).

(5) *David.*—On three occasions David confessed his sin in these words. His is an example of a genuine repentance, that "godly sorrow" which "worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." He sorrowed "after a godly sort," and it worked in him carefulness, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal and revenge against sin (2 Cor. vii. 10, 11).

(6) *The Prodigal.*—The Prodigal Son is the next example—

> I dreamed of bliss in pleasure's bowers,
> While pillowing roses stayed my head:
> But serpents hissed among the flowers;
> I woke, and thorns were all my bed.

Then he came to himself, and said, "I have sinned," a spontaneous confession; he returned home, was welcomed, forgiven, and reinstated in the position and privileges of a son.

3. What is true Penitence? There are four parts in a complete act of penitence, and they are all necessary. First there is the seeing of the fact, next the acknowledgment of the moral character of the fact, then the owning of responsibility to God for the wrong-doing, and last the consciousness that the wrong-doing is a wrong-being, that the sins are sinfulness. It may come upon a man all in a flash, as it did on David; or it may grow hardly, fought against stoutly, conquering step by step for itself, taking years, perhaps, to get entire possession of the nature. But it must come, and it must all come, or the man's sins are not genuinely confessed. When it has all come, a man need not question how it came—slowly or swiftly, calmly or violently; however it came, the confession is perfect, and in the utterness of his humiliation there is nothing more that he can do.

¶ In one of his delightfully satirical (apparently superficial but really searching) essays, M. Anatole France speaks of what is popularly called "confession." "I do not speak," he says, "of St. Augustine's *Confessions*; the great doctor does not confess enough in them. His is a spiritual book, which satisfies Divine love better than human curiosity. Augustine confesses to God and not to man; he hates his sins, and it is only those who still love their faults who make delightful confessions. He repents, and nothing spoils a confession like repentance. He says, for instance, in two charming phrases, that when quite tiny he was seen to smile in his cradle; and immediately he endeavours to demonstrate 'that there is corruption and malignity even in children who are still at the breast.' The saint spoils the man to my mind. He relates that in his childhood there was a pear tree loaded with pears close beside his father's vineyard, and that one day he went with a crowd of young vagabonds to shake the tree and to steal the fruit which fell from it. Does he make of this one of those delightful pictures such as delight us in the first pages of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*? or if that is asking too much, some elegant and sober narrative in the style of the minor Greek story-tellers? No! 'That,' he exclaims, 'is the state in which, O my Lord! was the miserable heart which it has pleased Thy mercy to drag out of the depths of the abyss!' As if an urchin who stole some wretched pears had fallen into

the depths of the abyss! He confesses his love-affairs, but he does not do it with grace, because he does it with shame. He speaks only of 'pestilences,' and of 'infernal vapours which arose out of the corrupt depth of his concupiscence.' Nothing could be more moral, but, at the same time, nothing less graceful. He does not write for the curious; he writes against the Manicheans. That annoys me doubly, for I am curious, and a little of a Manichean. But such as they are, free of the horror of the flesh, and of disgust at our terrestrial existence, Augustine's *Confessions* have contributed more than all the other books of the saint to make him known and loved throughout the ages."[1]

(1) *The admission of the fact that sin has been committed.*—That is the first step to be taken. That is the first struggle. To get at the plain facts; to set out in their array the long line of acts that have not been done from any higher motive than the mere desire for one's own personal comfort or advantage. Even this is not easy. The acts know their own guiltiness and flee behind all kinds of shelter to escape scrutiny; and the man who is really bent upon discovering and confessing them has to seize hold of their reluctance with a strong hand and force them out.

This is the first and perhaps the most difficult step. It is a humiliating thing to make such a confession. Many who fancy that they have repented have never really humbled themselves. It is marvellous to observe the different ways in which our pride will try to spare us the pain of real self-abasement. Sometimes it will endeavour to save us from lowering ourselves before men. It is true (this great enemy seems to whisper) that you have sinned against man as well as against God, but why acknowledge your shortcoming to your neighbour? Why give him an opportunity of lording it over you? Tell it, if you will, to your Maker, but do not humble yourself before man! At other times this subtle pride will tempt us to be content with only a half-humiliation in the presence of God Himself. "You are no worse," it says, "than others, not so bad as many. True, you have sinned, but your trial was so great, the circumstances in which you were placed were so difficult, your nature is so feeble that you may surely be excused," and so forth.

¶ The confession must be *personal*. There must be the personal act of faith; there must be my solitary coming to Him.

[1] Anatole France, *On Life and Letters*, 72.

As the old mystics used to define prayer, so I might define the whole process by which men are saved from their sins, "the flight of the lonely soul to the lonely God." It is not enough to say, "We have sinned"; we must say, "I have sinned." It is not enough that from a gathered congregation there should go up the united litany, "Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ, have mercy upon us! Lord, have mercy upon us!" We must make the prayer our own: "Lord, have mercy upon *me*!" It is not enough that we should believe that Christ has died for the sins of the whole world. That belief will give us no share in His forgiveness. We must come to closer grips with Him than that; and we must be able to say, "Who loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*."[1]

"My sin!" the low despairing sigh;
"My sin!" the exceeding bitter cry,
Out of those depths is heard on high:

Glad angels hear it where they stand,
And wait—a ministering band—
Their Lord's permission and command;

It comes—and swiftly, down from heaven
A light whereby the gloom is riven!
A voice of power and peace, "Forgiven!"[2]

(2) *The recognition of the moral evil that sin is.*—The second stage is the full acknowledgment of the true moral character of a sin. Suppose that the sin is simply selfishness. Once convinced that he is selfish, a man, with more or less consciousness of the sophistry that he is using, almost always sets to work to feel that selfishness is not wrong, but right. "Very well," he says, "I am selfish, I do live for myself; but what then? Whom should I live for? Is not my own interest and good my first care? Who will take care of me if I do not take care of myself? Must not charity begin at home? Is not this the way the world is meant to work, that every man should nurse his own interests, and so, by the development of each, they all should grow?" Unstated, vaguely felt, this is the acted theory of thousands. No man can possibly confess till first he casts this fallacy entirely away. "It is wrong to live to myself; it is not the design of life." Around him he must hear a great long wail of human suffering, rising and

[1] A. Maclaren. [2] S. J. Stone, *Poems and Hymns*, 102.

falling, now wilder and now weaker, but never dying utterly away —the ceaseless claim of needy humanity to be helped by the humanity that has abundance. More quiet, but not less pathetic, he must also hear the longing appeal of what seem the happiest and fullest hearts for sympathy in their joy as others seek it in their sorrow. Let his ears open to the appeals, and his conscience must open too. He will see that no man has a right to shut himself away from those whose life is one with his; nay, that no man has a right to do any act unless he sees that some one else will be the better or the happier for it as well as he. He will see that selfishness is wicked, and begin to be disgusted at his life, so full of it. He will add to the acknowledgment of the act the acknowledgment of the act's moral character, and his confession will be, not merely "I have been selfish," but "I have sinned."

¶ To follow the leading of the ideal was Thoreau's religion; and *sin*, whatever it might mean for other people, was to him simply the failure in this course. "Sin, I am sure, is not in overt act, or indeed in acts of any kind, but is in proportion to the time which has come behind us and displaced eternity, to the degree in which our elements are mixed with the elements of the world. The whole duty of life is implied in the question, how to respire and aspire both at once." So he wrote in his journal when he was a young man of twenty-four, and the remainder of his life and the manner of his death alike bear witness to the absolute sincerity of his convictions.[1]

(3) *The discovery that sin is always and above all an offence against God.*—Here is the first place where religion necessarily begins. All up to this point may be wholly unreligious. But the confession must be made to some one. What is the authority that has been violated by our acts which we have decided against as being selfish? Is it just the natural authority of the rights of our fellow-men—some human claim which they have upon our sympathy and help? Or is it some abstract law or principle of the mutual harmonies of universal life against which the selfish man sins, to which he must confess? Surely no obedience to such an abstraction—which, after all, is only a generalization, an induction of the man's own mind—can bind a man's hot passions from their self-indulgence, or bend his proud head in penitent confession

[1] H. S. Salt, *Henry David Thoreau*, 227.

of wrong-doing. What then? The law must come from God. We must be deeply, keenly conscious that every time we have done a selfish act we have broken His distinct commandment. We must have so entire a sense of how utterly He is love that we shall see every unloving thing that we have ever done to be a direct insult to His nature.

¶ No one knows till he has really thus confessed how great the relief is of a recognition of this sole responsibility to God. We mount above our fellow-men, and their judgment-seats. We leave their puny criticisms far below us. They may be right in blaming us—no doubt they are. But past their blame the very magnitude of our guilt exalts us to a higher judgment-seat. The soul, full of God's power and love at once, is not satisfied to utter itself to less than Him. It must cry as David did in that 51st Psalm, which he wrote about this same crime touching Uriah: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." In one word, it must be able to complete the whole confession of our text, and say, not merely, "I have sinned," but "I have sinned against the Lord."[1]

¶ The feeling which is here concentrated in one despairing sentence is amplified in the 51st Psalm. "Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." "Wash me throughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin." "Lo, thou requirest truth in the inward parts." "Turn thy face from my sins, and put out all my misdeeds. Make me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." "O give me the comfort of thy help again, and stablish me with thy free Spirit." "The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise."

¶ The oldest tradition regards this 51st Psalm as the outpouring of David's soul at this crisis, when the crowning sin of his life was brought home to him in all its heinousness. The ancient heading in our Bibles so describes it. Nor need we question the truth of this tradition. To the thoughtful mind it will appear to bear the very stamp of that terrible crime and that deep penitential sorrow. It would be difficult to fix on any incident, or any man, in the whole range of history, to whom the language and the feelings would be so appropriate as to the man after God's own heart in the first revulsion of spirit after his terrible fall. One objection only is offered to this ancient and widespread belief. The concluding verses seem to speak of a later period, when the city was rebuilding after the return

[1] Phillips Brooks.

from Babylon. But is it not reasonable to suppose that these two verses were a later addition to adapt the Psalm to liturgical uses?[1]

(4) And what more is there in the true confession of selfishness? Only one thing, and that is *the acknowledgment that the selfish acts which we confess are representations and expressions of a selfish character and heart in which our true guilt abides.* If we could make out an absolutely complete list of all the selfish acts that we have ever done, all the selfish words that we have ever spoken, all the selfish thoughts that we have ever thought, and, bringing it up, should unroll it in the sight of God, and, pointing with shame down the long catalogue, should say, "Look, Lord, and read. They are all there. I have not left out one. The black tale is complete" — when that is over, have we confessed our sinfulness? We have not touched it. As fertile and as foul as ever, it lies deep in our heart, ready to breed new selfish acts when these are cleared away. Not till we trace these things down to their roots; not till we say, "I did wrong things because I was a wrong thing. I lived for myself, not for my neighbours, and so broke God's law in my heart before I broke it with my hands. I was, I am, a living violation of it every day I live"; not till a spiritual logic thus traces back corrupt deeds to their source in a corrupt nature; not till "I have sinned" means "I am sinful," is the confession finally complete.

¶ How feebly we talk and think about the judgment-day! We tremble when we picture God upon His great white throne, hurling at our dismayed terror the long succession of our sins. We shudder at the thought of this deed and that which we must meet again. The true horror of the judgment-day will be the making manifest of hearts. What I have done will fade before the pre-eminent shame at what I have been. Then, if not before, deeds will take their true places as mere fruits and types of character. Just as we grow into the solemnity of the judgment-day we attain its point of view already, and learn to enlarge David's "I have sinned" into Simon Peter's "I am a sinful man, O Lord."[2]

[1] J. B. Lightfoot. [2] Phillips Brooks.

II.

Pardon.

"The Lord also hath put away thy sin."

1. Can there be anything more striking, can there be anything more in the nature of a gospel to us all, than this brief dialogue? "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin."

The two things to take account of are the immediacy of the pardon and its completeness.

(1) *The pardon was immediate.*—David had hardly been brought to own his guilt, had hardly got the words of confession off his lips, before the prophet, who represented before him the justice and authority of God, gave back the answer as if he had it all ready upon his lips and had been waiting for the chance to give it. "I have sinned against the Lord." "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." The whole was but the transaction of a moment. One minute he was standing obstinate and rebellious, stout in his sin, and the next minute the whole change had come, and the hard heart was softened and the proud will had bent and the sin was gone.

¶ The most intricate moral processes take but a moment to result. The volcano that the chemistry of years has been preparing breaks into eruption in an hour. The blossom that the patient plant has been designing for a century bursts into flower in a single night. And so the reconciliation of a soul to God, which it has been the labour of the ages to make possible, and which dates for its conception back to the dateless time when the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, comes to its completion in a period too short to measure, in the sudden meeting of a soul filled with penitence and a God filled with mercy.

Whenever humbly I begin
  To search my heart and own to Thee
My great perversity and sin,
  Thou hinderest me.

How can I tell what evil drifts
  Beneath the bench, behind the door,
When, everywhere I turn, Thy gifts
  Fill all the floor?

Miserere is not said
  Ere Benedictus is begun;
O visit not upon my head
  What Thou hast done![1]

(2) Not only was the answer immediate, *it was complete.*—The original language of the text might be rendered, "The Lord hath caused thy sin to pass away." The thought being substantially that of some impediment or veil between man and Him, which with a touch of His hand, He dissolves, as it were, into vapour, and so leaves all the sky clear for His warmth and sunshine to pour down upon the heart. Howsoever we have piled up mountain upon mountain, Alp upon Alp, of our evils and transgressions, all pass away and become non-existent. Another word of the Old Testament expresses the same idea when it speaks about sin being "covered." Still another word expresses the same idea when it speaks about God as "casting" men's sins "into the depths of the sea"—all meaning this one thing, that they no longer stand as barriers between the free flow of His love and our poor hearts. He takes away the sense of guilt, touches the wounded conscience, and there is healing in His hand.

¶ There is a law in our nature which makes it necessarily certain that if you touch a particular muscle the arm will quiver; if you appeal to a particular feeling the anger will rise and flush the face. Now, just so is it a law of God's nature—invariable with a godlike uniformity, more certain than the succession of the seasons or the comings and the goings of the stars—that if a human being touches Him with a true confession He must answer with an unreserved forgiveness.

Back turned I from that wave most blest,
Fresh, as fresh plant with fresh leaves dressed,
Prepared, all clean from cares,
To mount unto the stars.[2]

[1] Anna Bunston.

[2] Dante, *Purg.*, xxxiii. 142, tr. by Dr. Shadwell.

III.

Penalty.

"Howbeit, the child shall surely die."

1. So forgiveness does not mean impunity. A man may be pardoned, and nevertheless he may be punished. His sin may be put away from him, and yet its painful issues and results may flow in upon him as if his sin were unpardoned. God forgave David; yet God bereaved David. God announced his forgiveness, and yet in the same breath foretold his punishment: "Thy sin is put away; nevertheless, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." And this is no exceptional, no extraordinary, case. It is simply a notable illustration of a general law. In all ages the sins of penitent men are forgiven them; and in all ages penitent men have to endure the punitive results of the very sins that have been forgiven. Whatsoever they sow, that they reap, however bitterly they may repent having mingled tares with the wheat.

¶ Abraham sinned, in his eagerness to secure "the child of the promise," by taking Hagar to wife. His sin was forgiven him; but none the less he was troubled with strife and discord in his tent: *i.e.* the natural result of his deed came upon him. In his eagerness to secure the promised birthright, Jacob deceived his father, defrauded his brother. God forgave him his sin, nay, met him at Bethel to assure him of forgiveness, to ratify the promise, to foretell the wide inheritance of good on which he should enter. Yet he had to eat the bitter fruit of his sin through long years of labour and sorrow and fear. God chastened him again and again till, at Peniel, the subtle spirit of deceit was cast out of him. Yet, *even after that*—after the sin was pardoned, after the pardon was published, after the evil heart was replaced by a clean heart and a right spirit—even then, and to the very last, Jacob was deceived by his children, defrauded by his kinsmen and neighbours, was, in short, paid back in his own coin. St. Peter sinned, in that he denied his Master with oaths and curses. His sin was forgiven. It was the tender forgiving look of Christ that broke his heart when he went out and wept bitterly. Yet St. Peter had to go softly many days; to brook the pain of the thrice-repeated reproach, "Lovest thou me?" to find his sin recoiling upon him

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3. Why did David suffer after he had been forgiven? There are several good reasons.

(1) In the words of Nathan, he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The eminence of a man makes his sin the more conspicuous and the more deadly in its effects. The question for every man must be, What will be the result of sin on my part, not to myself only, but to the cause of Christ, to the character of religion? And putting the question thus, he will perceive that there are results over which he can have no control, that the mere escape of himself from personal consequences will not be the same as the blotting out of the sin. There may be in God's mercy the assurance, "Thou shalt not die"; but the deadly character of the sin may show itself in the death of the innocent. Furthermore, as a matter of fact, men are kept back from Christ as much by the inconsistency of His professed disciples as by any other cause whatever.

(2) But there are reasons in the very nature of sin. One very obvious reason why God does not detach their natural results from our sins, even when He forgives our sins, is that to do so would necessitate an incessant display of miraculous power before which all law and certainty would be swept away, and our very conceptions of right and wrong would be confused. God has so made the world and so ordered human life that every seed brings forth fruit of its kind, every action issues in a corresponding result. This is the constant invariable law. Holding fast by this law, we know what to expect, we can foresee what fruit our actions will bring forth. But were God for ever to violate the law by lifting every penitent beyond the reach of the painful results whose natural causes he had set in motion, no man would any longer know what to expect, an element of bewildering uncertainty would enter into every lot. Instead of that noble being, with large discourse of reason, looking before and after, instead of being able to calculate the results of action and to rely on the certainties of law, man would sink into the slave of an incalculable and unintelligible Caprice, pleasure and pain would be exalted over right and wrong, the sacredness of duty would be impaired, the very pillars of the universe would be shaken and removed out of their place.

¶ If a boy breaks a window with a stone and afterwards removes the stone, it does not mend the pane of glass.

¶ My father called me to him. "John," said he, very kindly, "I wish you would get the hammer." "Yes, sir." "Now a nail and a piece of pine board from the wood shed." "Here they are." "Will you drive the nail into the board?" It was done. "Please pull it out again." "That's easy." "Now, John," and my father's voice dropped to a lower, sadder key, "pull out the nail hole."

(3) And there are moral reasons. The penalty which follows transgression deepens our sense of sin, it strengthens our reliance on God, and it tests the reality of the repentance itself. As the old wounds reopen, and new sorrows spring from our old sins, we acknowledge our transgression, our sin is ever before us; we recognize the evil that is in us, and hate it with a more perfect hatred. Moreover, we can no longer trust ourselves. And so, drawn by our very straits and necessities, attracted and won by the very stroke which seemed to repel us, we come to God for a clean heart and a right spirit: we put our trust in Him, the God of our salvation. And if our repentance is sincere, if it is the evil and the alienation of our hearts that we really hate, and not the painful issues of our evil conduct, we shall take our punishment, not as the angry blows and rebukes of an offended God, but as the corrections of a loving Father who, because He desires nothing so much as our well-being, puts our penitence and our recovered obedience to a decisive test.

¶ If Kant emphasized the starry heavens and the moral law; if Daniel Webster emphasized the thought of personal responsibility to God, Hawthorne believed the greatest thought that can occupy the human mind is the thought of justice and its retributive workings through conscience. Doubtless there are a thousand problems that compete for the attention of youth; but for men grown mature and strong, life offers no more momentous question than this: Can the soul, injured by temptation and scarred by sin, ever recover its pristine strength and beauty? Is it true that the breach that guilt has made in the soul can never be repaired, but only guarded and watched, while always by the broken wall there lurks "the stealthy tread of a foe who waits to renew his unforgotten triumphs"? Is there no place of recovery, though man seek it long with tears? "I do not know," answers the old Greek; "I do not know that God has any right to for-

give sins." But Dante, having affirmed that man cannot forgive himself, thinks that sin may be consumed, and therefore makes the transgressor walk up a staircase of red-hot marble that pain may consume his iniquities. Though Hawthorne lived in a grim dark era, for him there was light on the top of the mountains. The summer shower, falling softly upon the banks of violets, cleanses the soot from the blossoms. In the deep forest glen a pure spring gushes, and into the deep pool wild birds plunge to brighten their dull plumage. And Hawthorne felt that somewhere life holds a fountain Divine for cleansing the dust from the soul's wings. Baring to us all the secrets of the human heart, and portraying the gradual unfolding of pain and penalty, he at last affirms that the sinning soul may recover its native simplicity and dignity through repentance and confession. Therefore, at the very gates of the jail into which the prisoner enters, Hawthorne made a rose-bush grow, with thorns indeed to typify the sharp pains that society inflicts upon the wrong-doer, but with blossoms, too, offering fragrance to the prisoner as he goes in, and suggesting that if the petals fall through the frosts of to-day, these falling petals, passing into the root, will reappear in the richer blossoms of to-morrow; as if another life might recover the disasters of this; as if, no matter what man's harshness, great nature and nature's God hold a wide, deep pity that can atone, forgive, and save.[1]

4. And so there is danger lest the walls we build to keep the truth in keep the souls of men out. Let us not be afraid to be as free as Christ. A whole confession must bring a true forgiveness. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us. The moment we cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," the reply is ready, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Magdalen at Michael's gate
  Tirled at the pin;
On Joseph's thorn sang the blackbird,
  "Let her in, let her in!"

"Thou bringest no offering," said Michael,
  "Nought save sin";
Sang the blackbird, "She is sorry, sorry, sorry;
  Let her in, let her in!"

[1] N. D. Hillis, *Great Books as Life Teachers*, 93.

"Hast thou seen the wounds?" said Michael,
"Knowest thou thy sin?"
"She knows it well, well, well," sang the blackbird;
"Let her in, let her in!"

When he had sung himself to sleep,
And night did begin,
One came and opened Michael's gate,
And Magdalen went in.[1]

[1] Henry Kingsley.

An Exceeding Bitter Cry.

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An Exceeding Bitter Cry.

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!—2 Sam. xviii. 33.

1. The story of Absalom's rebellion is one of the most exciting dramas in the Bible, and one of the guiltiest and saddest tragedies in human history. It is given to us in some of the most powerful word-pictures that have ever been painted. Clear, strong, and lifelike do the leading figures stand out. Absalom, with his stately form and flowing hair, his pride and courage, his sleek beauty and the cruel, tiger heart beneath it; Joab, the grim soldier, the man of blood and iron, to whom tears are weakness and pity unknown, who crushes his enemies with as little mercy and compunction as he would trample on a snake; and David, seen here at his best, recoiling from the unfeeling instrument which he is compelled to use, hardly caring for the throne which he must win back at such a price of blood, weary of life's ambitions and awful agonies, willing to resign even life itself if he might win back an erring child, and falling down broken-hearted in his lonely chamber while all Jerusalem is ringing with wild rejoicings over his victory. Is there a scene in human story more pathetic? Throne and people, rebel and traitor, battle and trumpet, all are forgotten in the father's pity for his boy. "O Absalom, my son, my son!"

2. So David mourned for Absalom, and somehow none of us wish to find fault with him. Is that because it happened so very long ago and matters nothing to us? For men found fault with David at the time; at least Joab did, and very sensibly too, for the people were as dejected as if they were a beaten army

stealing home after battle, and yet this Absalom for whom the king made such a lamentation was one (says Joab) who, had he won, would now have been massacring the king's sons and daughters and wives and loyal servants. And what a life, too, he had led all along! First he had murdered his own brother under the pledge of hospitality (no doubt in vengeance for a bitter wrong); he had turned traitor to his own father, and that by advantage of that father's forgiveness. Now he was dead, and the world well rid of him, and honest folk might have their own again and sleep in peace. What folly to bemoan such an one; what weak, and, in a king, what culpable indulgence in the luxury of idle grief! But somehow we to-day forgive David for it, or if we think Joab's remonstrance sensible, we forgive at any rate that first outburst in the chamber over the gate. Yet what was Absalom to deserve it? For in truth there is only one good thing we can discover to say of Absalom: and that one good thing we learn from David's outburst. It is that once he had had David's love, and such a love as could cry, "Would God I had died for thee."

3. The dead son's faults are all forgotten and obliterated by death's "effacing fingers." The headstrong, thankless rebel is, in David's mind, a child again, and the happy old days of his innocence and love are all that remain in memory. The prodigal is still a son. The father's love is immortal and cannot be turned away by any faults. The father is willing to die for the disobedient child. Such purity and depth of affection lives in human hearts. So self-forgetting and incapable of being provoked is an earthly father's love. May we not see in this disclosure of David's paternal love, stripping it of its faults and excesses, some dim shadow of the greater love of God for His prodigals—a love which cannot be dammed back or turned away by any sin, and which has found a way to fulfil David's impossible wish, in that it has given Jesus Christ to die for His rebellious children, and so made them sharers of His own Kingdom?

Is it so far from thee
Thou canst no longer see,
In the Chamber over the Gate,
That old man desolate,

Weeping and wailing sore,
For his son, who is no more?
O Absalom, my son!

Is it so long ago
That cry of human woe
From the walled city came
Calling on his dear name,
That it has died away
In the distance of to-day?
O Absalom, my son!

There is no far or near,
There is neither there nor here,
There is neither soon nor late,
In that Chamber over the Gate,
Nor any long ago
To that cry of human woe,
O Absalom, my son!

For the ages that are past
The voice sounds like a blast
Over seas that wreck and drown,
Over tumult of traffic and town;
And from ages yet to be
Come the echoes back to me,
O Absalom, my son!

Somewhere at every hour
The watchman on the tower
Looks forth, and sees the fleet
Approach of the hurrying feet
Of messengers, that bear
The tidings of despair.
O Absalom, my son!

He goes forth from the door,
Who shall return no more.
With him our joy departs;
The light goes out in our hearts;
In the Chamber over the Gate
We sit disconsolate.
O Absalom, my son!

That 'tis a common grief
Bringeth but slight relief;
Ours is the bitterest loss,
Ours is the heaviest cross;
And for ever the cry will be
"Would God I had died for thee,
O Absalom, my son!"[1]

I.

David's Sorrow.

In David's cry of anguish there was the torture of self-accusation. The sting of death is sin. The sting of that death to David was Absalom's sin, and alas! his own sin too. If we recall the things which had happened in David's life years before, we shall have no doubt that the remembrance of his own misdoings testified against him now, and that he saw in that tragedy, in part at least, the harvest for which he had done the sowing. Nathan the prophet had come to him in the hour of his transgression and predicted almost this very thing, that the sword would never depart from his house, and that out of his own household would come his torturing cross and shame. How could it be otherwise? He had violated the domestic sanctities, taken another man's wife, and sent that man to his death. With the coming of Bathsheba there came into his home strife, hatred, and division. It is a terrible picture of family life; perpetual quarrels, and sometimes bloodshed. It is the old story of favouritism and jealousy. Bathsheba's child, Solomon, was the favoured one, and seemed likely to be chosen David's successor. Absalom plunged into rebellion, not merely through ambition, but because he feared that the succession was slipping away from him. We can see the whole plot working itself out. We can see the whole household rioting in sin, and David had no power to stop it. His hand was paralysed, for had not he himself been the first and chief transgressor? He had sowed the wind and now the whirlwind was upon him. And he knew and felt it when he cried, "O Absalom, my son! would God I had died for thee!"

[1] Longfellow.

"Good-bye," I said, to my conscience—
"Good-bye for aye and aye,"
And I put her hands off harshly,
And turned my face away;
And conscience, smitten sorely,
Returned not from that day.

But a time came when my spirit
Grew weary of its pace;
And I cried: "Come back, my conscience,
I long to see thy face."
But conscience cried, "I cannot,
Remorse sits in my place."[1]

¶ "The inconceivable evil of sensuality" was surely never more awfully burned in upon any sinful house than it was upon David's house. David himself is a towering warning to all men, and especially to all godly men, against this master abomination. And he is so all the more that he sinned so terribly against such singular grace. David, to use his own words, was as white as snow as long as he was young, and poor, and struggling up, and oppressed and persecuted, and with Samuel's horn of oil still sanctifying all the thoughts and all the imaginations of his heart. But no sooner had David sat down on the throne of Israel than his life of sin and shame began. And all the woe upon woe of his after-life, almost every single deadly drop of it, came down out of that day when he first introduced open and unblushing sensuality into his palace in Jerusalem. There was military success, and extended empire, and great wealth, and great and far-sounding glory in David's day in Israel; but beneath it all the whole ground was mined and filled to the lip with gunpowder, and the Divine tinder all the time was surely burning its way to the Divine vengeance on David's house. Our doctors, our lawyers, our ministers, and many of ourselves, will all subscribe to Newman's strong words in one of his sermons—"The inconceivable evil of sensuality."[2]

¶ I cannot help recalling the life of James Stirling, well-known as the first temperance missionary in Scotland. James was a drunkard up to his sixtieth year; but then he was, through the abstinence movement, rescued from his danger and "plucked as a brand out of the fire." Out of gratitude for his deliverance, he gave himself for the next twenty years of his life to the advocacy of the temperance cause, travelling over the length and

[1] W. H. Birckhead. [2] Alexander Whyte.

breadth of Scotland, helping to save men from the curse of strong drink. On one of those journeys, when he arrived at Aberdeen, he met with one of his sons, who, taking after his father's early example, had become a drunkard, and was at that time a soldier. The two had a long and interesting talk in the evening, and old James thought the youth was doing better. But in the morning he was sent for in great haste; and, hurrying to the place, wondering much what the message meant, he was shown the body of his son, who had committed suicide during the night. Who may describe the anguish of that father's heart as David's wail was wrung out of him, while he appended this of his own: "Had I been a sober man all my life, this might never have occurred."[1]

¶ Sensuality is a prolific cause of suicide. Impurity leads to melancholy, melancholy to despair, and despair to suicide. It is not only the woman who grows weary of breath and plunges into the swift flowing river. When young men from home fall into the ways of sin, they become callous and indifferent to the claims of affection. The brief, infrequent letter home finally ceases altogether. A young man was found drowned in the Clyde, and the newspapers said he was unknown. Within three days two hundred letters came from two hundred mothers asking for a description of the drowned youth. What a terribly suggestive fact is this, all too eloquent of wayward sons and aching hearts.[2]

II.

David's Discipline.

Of all the hours of agony in David's life—of all hours of merely human agony in the history of the Bible—that was, beyond all doubt, the darkest. First, in the loud bitter cry, as he rushed from the awestruck crowd of soldiers and messengers and the townsmen of Mahanaim, then from that chamber of sorrow over the gateway, in the long protracted wailing of a broken heart did that agony find vent—"O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee; O Absalom, my son, my son!" Terrible was it to think that this was the end of that bright morning of beauty and joy in which his heart had exulted; more terrible still to feel that his own sins had wrought out that fearful retribution. Had his own life been purer, that son might

[1] W. M. Taylor. [2] D. Watson, *The Heritage of Youth*, 89.

have been free from the guilt of incest; had he done his duty as a father and a king, punishing at the right time, forgiving at the right time, all might still have been well. And now all was over. The doom of that great woe was irreparable. Of him also it was true, within the limits of man's vision, that "he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." And yet, not the less may we believe that, in that hour of shattered hopes, and agony beyond words, when there seemed to have fallen on him the horror of great darkness, the life of David, all unconscious as he was of it, was passing through the refiner's fire, and becoming purer and brighter than it had ever been in the days of his most glowing victories, or the moments of his most ecstatic adoration. The darkest of all human sorrows brings him into contact with that which is superhuman.

Good Lord, to-day
I scarce find breath to say:
  Scourge, but receive me.
For stripes are hard to bear, but worse
Thy intolerable curse;
  So do not leave me.

Good Lord, lean down
In pity, tho' Thou frown;
  Smite, but retrieve me:
For so Thou hold me up to stand
And kiss Thy smiting hand,
  It less will grieve me.[1]

III.

Two Types.

We may take David's sorrow for Absalom as a type or human picture of the Divine Fatherhood and of its unlimited forgiveness. And, again, we may take David's cry, "Would God I had died for thee!" as a type or forecast of the atoning act of Christ.

1. *The Fatherhood of God.*—David is called the man after God's own heart, and that word staggers us when we remember

[1] C. G. Rossetti.

some of his doings. But the word does not come amiss here. We feel that it is true in such scenes as this. Kneeling in his chamber and uttering that impassioned cry of pity, burning love, and forgiveness, we can see indeed something of God's own heart. In this great tribulation he is as one washed and made white, and his face is like the tearful Christ's, Godlike. His love for this guilty hard-hearted son was passing strange; it was almost more than human. It was a love which gave a kiss for every blow, turned a forgiving face to every insult and stripe, and prayed for the criminal who was crucifying it. Through all the suffering and shame which Absalom's revolt had brought upon him, through all the infamous treachery, he clung with fond affection to the boy, the man who was still his child in spite of all. Ugly in his cruelty, hateful in his falsehood, he was still beautiful in his father's eyes. He had done every mean and dastardly thing, schemed and conspired like a very devil against his father, driven him from his house, robbed him of his friends, sought his life and would have trampled with fury on his corpse. Yet through all this, David's one thought was to woo and win back his boy, to restore him to the old place, to heap forgiveness on his crimes and cover them all with great waters of love as the sea hides its secrets and its dead.

All this is what we rightly call Divine. It is a broken light of God. It is the image of His Fatherhood. All worthy fathers and mothers have something of it. What wrongs can entirely alienate and destroy a father's love? What insults can turn a mother obstinately against her child? What shame resting on our children's faces can make us hide our faces from theirs? From what wanderings would we not fetch them back? Into what pit would we not descend to bring them up and wash them clean? What iniquities would repel us if they returned with tears of penitence and asked us to take them into our arms again? And when do we ever cease hoping and striving to redeem them when they have fallen? Death itself can hardly stop us praying for them, though they have died in very sin.

¶ Such a one is dead, gone (as we say) to his last account: it is a bad record which closes, a life vicious, reckless, false: the world sighs with relief to be well rid of him: the Joabs have struck their spears into him as he hung in calamity's grip, and

the multitude have cast each man his opprobrious stone to build up the monument of infamy over that disastrous life. But meanwhile the news of that shameful ending has been borne to the towers of Heaven. Is it relief, is it exultation, is it opprobrium that greets it there? I think not. Rather I think it is a Father, a Divine Father, mourning in His high place with a sorrow larger than the sorrow of man, over His son. True, He knows (for is He not Divine?), He knows better even than Joab and the multitude how bad a son this child has been; He knows his follies, perversities, rebellions, treacheries, violences—who so well as He? But it is something over which that infinite compassion, that unconquerable love, bends in sorrow. That Father is mourning not the fool, the rebel, the profligate, but the son whom He knew before these evil days: the child of His desires, His hopes; the man who might have been, who was not, and now can never be. In that chamber over the gate of Heaven there sits a Presence which we image often to ourselves as the just, unyielding Judge, impassively dealing out man's due. But if there be joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth, shall there not be sorrow among them for one sinner lost to repentance? And shall not the Lord of the Angels sorrow the most over the child whom He brought into the world, whom He made a living soul and on its birthday looked on it in love, and behold, then and there and thus at least, and as its Father had made it to be, behold, it was very good?[1]

¶ The Jewish Rabbis of a later time, in their strange legendary way, showed some sympathy with the yearnings of the father's heart. For each time that the words "my son" came from the lips of David, one of the seven gates of Gehenna (so they fabled) rolled back, and with the last the spirit of Absalom passed into the peace of Paradise.[2] Augustine, on the contrary, here, as too often elsewhere, placing himself on the judgment-seat of God, passes sentence of condemnation, chiefly, it might almost seem, because he saw in Absalom's guilt a parallel to the rebellion of the Donatists against the Catholic Church, and read their doom in his doom.

¶ Explorers opened an Egyptian tomb, a tomb shut hard and fast by the iron silence of three thousand years. There stood an exquisitely carved sarcophagus of a little child, and over it this inscription: "Oh, my life, my love, my little one! Would God I had died for thee!" Instinctively the men uncovered their

[1] J. H. Skrine.

[2] Bartolocci, *Biblioth. Rabbinica*, ii. 128–162.

heads, and with dim eyes stepped silently out into the light. They replaced and sealed the portal, and left love and death to their eternal vigil. How old is love? Old as the human heart, old as God.[1]

2. *The Atonement of Christ.*—Again, and in the truest and deepest sense, the life of David is a type of a higher life, his agony a foreshadowing of the agony of Gethsemane. That passionate cry, "Would God I had died for thee—died in thy stead, delivering, redeeming thee"; that wonderful union of a father's righteous hatred of the evil, with a yearning, ever-deepening love for the poor wayward doer of the evil, were leading him through that living experience by which, and perhaps by which alone, the mystery of Atonement ceases to be a dogma of the Schools and becomes the most precious of all realities. So it had been before with Moses, when he cried in his intercession, "Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Ex. xxxii. 32). So it was afterwards with St. Paul, when he wrote in his great heaviness, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. ix. 3). That craving of man's spirit, when it is most after the likeness of Christ, to sacrifice its own peace, life, blessedness for the sake of others, helps us to understand, vain and fruitless as it may often seem to be (he who makes the sacrifice himself needing pardon), the perfect sacrifice of the Sinless One. "With men it is impossible, but not with God." What kings and prophets desired to do and could not, that the Son of God did, taking away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

¶ I must tell you of a touching (and it struck me peculiarly Northumbrian) saying I heard the other day from a poor old woman who wished her paralytic husband to be allowed a seat near the pulpit on the Communion Sunday, as he is deaf and does not go to church, and is, indeed, a Deist (very common in Blandford), but she thought seeing the tables covered might do him good. "For eh!" she said in a faltering voice, almost in tears, "it is a lovely sight." Poor body, I could have cried myself to think of all she has probably passed through for that man, praying, as she said, night and morning for him, and he now old and almost out of hail with his infirmities.[2]

[1] J. H. Ecob.

[2] Marcus Dods, in *Early Letters of Marcus Dods*, 111.

By Thy long-drawn anguish to atone,
Jesus Christ, show mercy on Thine own:
Jesus Christ, show mercy and atone
Not for other sake except Thine own.

Thou who thirsting on the Cross didst see
All mankind and all I love and me,
Still from Heaven look down in love and see
All mankind and all I love and me.[1]

[1] C. G. Rossetti.

The Well by the Gate.

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THE WELL BY THE GATE.

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me water to drink of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate!—2 Sam. xxiii. 15.

THERE are stories in the Bible which we are almost afraid to touch for fear of spoiling them. Although we cannot exactly say that they teach us any lesson, the mere reading of them makes us feel better. They lift us into a region high above our ordinary life, and make us breathe a purer atmosphere than that which is generally around us. Like a fine piece of music or a fine autumn evening, they take us out of ourselves and awaken in us vague, big thoughts and lofty feelings, and touch us with a sense of the grandeur and sacredness of our destiny. Such a story is this of David and the Well of Bethlehem. It makes an irresistible appeal to our better feelings, makes us think more worthily of man, and brings us nearer to God.

David was a fugitive, hiding in caves and lurking in woods, with a rather disorderly and disreputable troop of followers, in constant peril of his life, and in constant risk of being caught by his deadly enemy, king Saul. He was still a comparatively young man; yet he was outlawed. From the jealousy of Saul he had sought shelter at the court of Achish at Gath; but there, too, he had found himself surrounded by danger, and, having feigned madness, he had fled to the cave of Adullam, and after that to the hold on the hill above the cave.

As he now looked forth, the whole country round was full of rich memories. Just at the foot of the hill he had fought the famous battle with Goliath which had marked him out as the future monarch of Israel. At no great distance was Bethlehem, the village in which he had been born and bred, and almost within sight were the slopes where David as a shepherd lad had watched his father's sheep; while down between the summits of

those distant hills was the gate of Bethlehem, near which was the well where David had quenched his thirst a thousand times in those early and happy days. Now he was a hated outlaw. Saul and Achish alike sought his life. Moreover, between him and the well was the camp of the Philistines, who had just invaded that rich, fertile plain, as was their wont at harvest-time, to plunder it of the grain which was now ripe for the sickle.

I.

David Longed.

There came upon David a consuming desire for a taste of that water which was at the gate-side of the little town, so few miles away, where once had been his home. He was looking down upon scenes familiar since his boyhood; he suffered from the burning thirst of an Oriental summer day. Overpoweringly he remembered the days when his now bronzed face was ruddy, the evenings when he piped the sheep to their fold—all that dear domestic life, with its rural duties and its untroubled faith. The burning sun, the excitement of the hour, and the contiguity of the well increased his thirst; all the memories of his boyhood connected with that well now crowded upon him. And, thinking of it all, "David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me water to drink of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate!" It was the cry of a homesick heart, and the incident is the sweetest thing in David's life. Never was David more manly or more truly human than when he longed for a drink from the old well of his boyhood.

1. This is the longing of an essentially *good* man for the things of his childhood. David was no disappointed worldling. But the troubles and trials, sorrows and disappointments of life had begun to close around him. The days of youth were over for him. He was a grown man, a marked man, a famous captain, the pride of Israel, one on whom the eyes of the nation were fixed. But he was a wanderer, driven from place to place by the moody temper and the jealousy of king Saul, insecure of his life from day to day, hunted, as he himself said, "like a partridge on the mountains." The beautiful boy, the youth of a ruddy countenance, was now a bearded, careworn man, tried by watchings, fastings, and perils

alike in the city and in the wilderness. Then, it seems, in an hour when the heart of David was probably burdened with the sense of life's disillusionments, when "days were dark and friends were few," when experience had brought to him a feeling of the mystery that covers the ways of God, and of the sorrow that haunts the steps of man—then, we are told, the thoughts of David went back, with a great tenderness and yearning to the far-off days of youth and the scenes of childhood, and the cry broke from his lips—"Oh that one would give me water to drink of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate!"

> Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
> Tears from the depth of some divine despair
> Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
> In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
> And thinking of the days that are no more.[1]

2. It is the longing of a *successful* man. David was not one of life's failures, who had run the race of life in vain aud now looked back sadly to the promising start. He had run the race well; he had outstripped all his rivals, and he had risen higher than the most venturesome hopes of boyhood dared to soar. All of honour and wealth and power the world had to give, it had given to him, for he had been taken from following his father's sheep to sit upon the throne of Israel; and no forsaken outcast, but a king, is he who in the cave of Adullam longs for water from the well of Bethlehem. The world had given to this man all it has to give—given what it can give but seldom and only to a few—and he had longings still. For there in the cave of Adullam he thought not of the shouts of the army of Israel or of the rejoicing songs with which he was welcomed by Israel's daughters; nor did he think there of the honour to which he had been raised, or of the house of cedar he had built for himself. His weary spirit fled away for rest back to the days when he drank of the well of Bethlehem; and all of his life that the world would have thought worth living he would willingly have unlived, and all his honours, his rank, and his possessions he would willingly have laid aside for the light heart and the cloudless days of youth.

¶ A friend told the writer of a visit he made one summer to the home of his childhood. He had not been back for many years.

[1] Tennyson.

The old place had passed into the hands of strangers. The present occupant took him from room to room until he had reached the attic. There, draped in cobwebs, stood an old spinning-wheel. At sight of it his heart went to his throat. "It is my mother's spinning-wheel," he said. "If you will look just there you will see a blood mark. One day, when a little boy, I cut my finger and the blood trickled down on the spot while my mother tied up the wound. You must let me have this old wheel to take to my home and to my children. It brings back to me my mother and my childhood as nothing else has done."

3. It is a longing we can all more or less understand. David, like a true poet, felt and experienced the thoughts and feelings that stir in hundreds and thousands of minds, though only the one man has the gift of putting them into speech.

¶ There is no man or woman who does not say occasionally or feel with Job, "Oh that I were as in months past!" We have visions of happy wells of which we drank in the dear old days, and from which we are now inevitably separated. We think of the time when everything was new to us and the world crammed with glory, when perfect health was in our veins and our heart-beats were all music, and we had no heavy burden of care to carry, and sorrow had not brought the shadows, and we hardly knew what it was to be weary, and no day was ever too long, and we wanted no heaven beyond because it was all heaven below."[1]

Four ducks on a pond,
A grass bank beyond,
A blue sky of spring,
White clouds on the wing.
What a little thing
To remember for years,
To remember with tears!

II.

What did He Long for?

1. David thirsted, and he longed for water. But any water would not satisfy him. He longed for *water from a particular well*—"from the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate." The traditional "David's Well" is half a mile N.N.E. of Bethlehem. Ritter speaks of its "deep shaft and clear cool water." A picture

[1] J. I. Vance, *Royal Manhood*, 159.

of it rose before David now—the sweet, cold water which he used to drink when he was a boy—and he longed for it. But why did he long for it? Was there no other fountain in all the neighbourhood from which there might have been brought for the weary king a draught as pure and cool, no other fountain whose waters could have quenched his thirst? What possible difference could it make to David whether he drank water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem, or from the spring by the cave where he lay? Thirst is thirst, and water is water. If you drink the water you slake your thirst—and that is all there is in it. What difference is there?

2. What David really desired was not mere water, or even water from the well of Bethlehem, but to drink its water as he had done in other days—*to drink it with the feelings of childhood.* He wished to be again the shepherd boy passing in and out at the gate of Bethlehem, free from care as in the days of other years. It was natural, but it was vain. When he longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem he forgot to consider how, though the well might be the same, he was changed; how, even if its waters were given him clear and cool as in days long ago, he must drink of it now no longer as the light-hearted boy of Bethlehem, but as a careworn man.

3. David wanted, not what he thought he wanted and asked for so importunately, but his *childhood.* We easily read enough between the lines of the incident to comprehend that the thirst was not so much in this man's throat as in his heart. Amid these deeds of arms his spirit was wounded and parched. Near his native place, within sight of the hills on which he kept his father's sheep, he was thinking of his boyhood, and his longing for the dear old well was a home-sickness. Worn out with his manifold troubles and anxieties, he wished to be a child again, and the well round which he used to play seemed a kind of fountain of youth. If he could only drink of its water, all the heavy weight of the years would fall off his spirit and he would become young again, with all the fresh hopes that animated him in life's morning.

Ye see me now an ould man, his work near done,
Sure the hair upon me head's gone white;

But the things meself consated 'or the time that I could run,
They're the nearest to me heart this night.
Just the daisies down in the low grass,
The stars high up in the skies,
The first I knowed of a mother's face
Wi' the kind love in her eyes,
Och, och!
The kind love in her eyes.[1]

III.

Why did He Long for it?

1. David was feeling the strong *pressure of memory*, the strength of association with a happy past; the force of that strongest of all the associations which bind a man with unalterable piety to the scene of a happy boyhood. It was merely a sentiment; there were other wells as refreshing, other waters as cool, as that which trickled forth at Bethlehem. But the well of Bethlehem surely reminded him of the early days, with all their glad, free innocent ways, when he was a simple-hearted, God-fearing child, knowing little of evil and nothing of fighting and sorrow and life's rough work. Now his hands had shed blood; his heart had been torn with fierce passions. It was not as in the olden days. He had lost much. He had gained much also, but it was the loss that he thought of now.

2. Why is it that men turn back thirsty and weary to the streams of their boyhood, and lighten up the darkness of their cave with the glory of memory? Because there are *losses* connected with the passing of youth which can never be repaired and made good. Other good gifts may come in the place of the gifts of youth; but David showed in that cry for "the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate," that he was conscious of the loss of something which was absolutely past recovery. The feeling has been expressed in most beautiful verse by Wordsworth. He says that with youth something was gone from him which could never be restored.

Nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower.

[1] Moira O'Neill, *Songs of the Glens of Antrim.*

(1) David was thinking of his *lost enthusiasms.* He had not reached his prime, yet life seemed to be closing in. There were withdrawals and impoverishments about his life which perplexed that large spirit within him, as it yearned for wider scope, fuller liberty, and nobler attainments. He yearned for the ampler liberties of youth, the wild free play of childhood. He longed for those days when mankind appeared as one brotherhood; when the thought of hating, or being hated, had never crossed his mind, but when all men appeared to be one loving confederacy.

How strong the memory of victorious enthusiastic youth was in David! The first encounter with the lion and the bear—what strength it gave him! What a force it was! That great encounter with the Philistines, when in his generous, boy-like ardour he could not understand how men who believed in God could cower before a bully giant, or acquiesce in a living degradation! See again how this lived with him into darker years! See him take the sword of Goliath from the sacred precinct where it had been laid up as a consecrated relic, and say, "There is none like that; give it me!"

¶ It constitutes the great and magnificent quality of youth that it can glow and blaze. It is a very commonplace thought after all that when men are old they will take things more calmly, meaning only that the fires will have burned low. Cynicism is a poor exchange for enthusiasm. There are many and manifest temptations of youth, such as rashness, both of judgment and of conduct, hotheadedness, passion, unbalanced zeal, but these are all the extravagances of what is its finest quality. The world needs the strong hopefulness and buoyancy of youth, as well as the large experience and cautious wisdom of age. Youth is the motive-power of the world, driving it to new ends, and bringing to it new hopes.[1]

> How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
> All the heart and the soul and the senses, for ever in joy![2]

(2) David was thinking of his *lost ideals.* In life, with its failures and disappointments, its cruel blows, its dread sufferings, we are all too apt to become flat and weary, stale, unprofitable, quenched in our enthusiasm, blinded in our hopes, blunted in our enterprises. We want, like David, draughts from the water

[1] H. Black.

[2] Browning, *Saul.*

of the well at Bethlehem, where we can renew our youth, and forget the darkness of the cave, the heartlessness of the foes, and the dull weight of defeats, which lie between us and the past.

¶ A boy at school has not yet become, thank God, a bankrupt in spent pleasures. He is not that miserable creature whom you see lounging round the amphitheatre of life, languidly wondering whether the prizes which it offers are after all worth the trouble of contesting them. He is not that pitiable being who has lost all beauty out of nature, all refinement from art, all the subtler joys of simple life, in the frantic plunge after pleasure, followed by a brutal incapacity for enjoyment, and who "sees a blight in every flower, a canker in every fruit, and a baldness on the head of every prophet."[1]

3. There are some persons, no doubt, who tell us that all this is mere sentimentality, that it is all a mistake, that people regard the days of youth with affection only because they are far off and out of reach; or that, at any rate, it is very foolish and very unprofitable to cry over what is past recall, and to indulge in feelings which are weak and enervating, and which may unfit them for the practical business of the present hour. Well, no doubt it is possible to be mawkish and feebly sentimental about the past, and to waste to-day in useless regrets for that which is beyond recovery. But we pity the man or woman who cannot feel, at moments, as David felt, when he turned from the heat and burden of a busy, harassed life, and thought of the quiet fields of Bethlehem and the sheepfolds, and of the sweet cool water of the well by the gate, and the dear memories of childhood, youth, and home. Do you suppose David was unnerved and enfeebled and rendered less capable of facing the rough, hard cares and troubles and difficulties of life because his mind was carried back, with a great rush of love, to the days that were no more—the golden days of the morning of life?

Far from that. It is well now and then to go back in thought, and drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate. It is well to go back to the unstained memories and associations of the dawn of life; to recall the glowing dreams and visions of boyhood and girlhood; to think of the time when the mind first awoke, and the mystery and splendour of life lay

[1] Canon Newbolt.

unfolded before us; to rebuild in fancy the world where we first began to know and understand the high lessons of duty and obedience, and received on our souls the first impress of those Divine truths which "wake to perish never," and remain

> The fountain-light of all our day,
> The master-light of all our seeing.

To think of these things when the cares and troubles of life press heavily on us, and when the heart is sore, and the feet are weary, and the world grows cold and grey, is often to find new strength and hope and courage for the necessary work of life.

¶ "Forty years after Dr. Kidd's death, my father was stopped by an elderly woman as he was walking in the neighbourhood of Rose Street, Dundee. She wore an apron, under which she seemed to carry a parcel. This she took from its hiding-place just as my father and she met each other. It was a little portrait in a paltry frame, the same likeness of Dr. Kidd that does duty as a frontispiece of some of his books. 'You'll mind wha that is,' said she. My father looked at the engraving, and replied that he well remembered the Doctor. 'I'm but a puir body,' continued the woman, 'I get aff the Buird' (the Parochial Board), 'but I saw the pictur' a while syne in a broker's shop—it was ninepence, and I saved up till I was able to buy it.' And then she told how the Doctor used to preach in the Chapelshade Kirk on fast-days or communion Sabbaths when she was a lassie, and how much spiritual good she had got from his ministrations there, few and far between as his appearances must have been. 'I sometimes think,' added she, 'that I can hear his voice reading in the Revelations yet.'"[1]

> We leave the simple master-words of life
> Behind us with the toys of childhood's years,
> Whilst in the book-bound wisdom of the seers
> We seek some scant equipment for the strife.
>
> All nature's lore and tenderness we spurn,
> Alone fare forth in search of gold or fame,
> And then look backward through the dust and shame,
> Knowing that we can nevermore return.
>
> Yet now and then a sunset or a flower,
> Or some old haunt revisited once more,
> Or the sea's story whispered to the shore,
> Or the wind's music in a listening bower,

[1] *Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen*, 305.

Will bring again the unalloyed delight
We knew before our life had held a wrong,
Recall the refrain of a cradle-song,
And lift the shadows from our saddened sight.[1]

IV.

How was the Longing Satisfied?

1. Water was brought to David from the very well of which he desired to drink. Three of these mighty men overheard that longing as it broke forth from his weary spirit. They waited for no command, they sounded no trumpet, they summoned no companies, but forth they went and perilled their very lives that David might have his wish. They fought their way to the well of Bethlehem—the well by the gate; they drew for their master; with their swords they cleared their way as they returned to the cave of Adullam, and there they presented the crystal draught the king had longed for. But the pure sweet water he had longed for above all things was now nothing to him in itself though he had it in his hands. He would not drink it. He knew now that he wanted it no more; or rather he knew that deeper than the thirst for water had been the longing of his wearied spirit which mere water could not satisfy.

2. If David could have gone back to the actual scenes of his childhood, he would still have been unsatisfied. He might have returned to the home of his boyhood and revisited scenes amid which he had wandered free from care, and the fields and the trees and the streams which he loved might have been around him—the same, yet how different! The charm is gone. He has returned to the home; but he can never return to the feelings of his youthful days. There is no actual going back. We cannot begin again, start afresh, make a new attempt, with the added experience of life, as many of us would like to do—"To the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return." We cannot now re-write the story of our lives. The record, with all its faults, mistakes, confusions, sins, must stand. Nor can

[1] Percy C. Ainsworth, *Poems and Sonnets*, 31.

we replace the losses of the heart, the separations of death, and alas! the separations of life.

¶ We return to a memory-haunted scene, and how strangely the hills, the streams, the streets have dwindled and shrunk together. Size is relative to that central affection which magnifies all its store of surroundings. That which is about us has its perspective, not in fact, but in love's wiser fancy. We cannot restore the outer ratio of what made life's earliest impressions. A secret and vanished beauty fails of reattachment to visible things. The lute is hushed, the chairs are vacant, and Charles Lamb's plaint rises to pallid lips:—

> Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood,
> Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse,
> Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

The well is shallower. The waters that "were wont to go warbling so softly and well" do not flow as they used to flow. Their gush and sparkle have escaped, and something insipid and tasteless has come. The sweetness was about, not in, the draught. The taste was in the tongue and the lips that have changed.[1]

3. David here was crying for his vanished childhood, and in a moment certain things happened which proved to him that he was *richer as a man* than he had ever been as a child. He had won friendships that were faithful to him even unto death. Three men among his followers, as soon as they heard his cry, went off, without a moment's doubt, to obey; they broke through an army, their lives hanging by a hair at every turn, on the mere chance of bringing him a draught. It was surely more than all the delights of childhood to have gained such devotion, such love, as that! It was brought home to him that even here, in dreary Adullam, with its bitter experiences and brackish water, he had what not even Bethlehem with all its wells could give him. He had gained much, though he had lost much. He had gained more than he had lost.

There are better things than the glory of childhood, just as the gnarled, strong, winter-worn oak is nobler than the slender sapling with its first shoots of green. God did not send us into the world to be always children; but to be strong, long-suffering,

[1] M. W. Stryker.

serviceable men and women; to make friends and deserve their friendship; to learn patience through sorrow and courage by facing difficulties, and to take a real soldier's part in the great battle of life. And if we are doing that, there is no need to sigh for our Bethlehem days. A man, if he has grown with some sense of duty, with some fear of God, and in a religious way; if he has fought with temptation and not always yielded; if he has learned some of the finer lessons which experience teaches, is in all ways richer than he was as a youth or a little child. His thoughts are larger and wiser; his whole conception of things is more Godlike; his sympathies are wider; his world is a bigger place. He loves and pities his fellow-men more; his hands and brain and heart are fitter for work; his influence is greater; and the world which thanks God for the children ought to thank God even more for him.

¶ The regret we have for our childhood is not wholly justifiable: so much a man may lay down without fear of public ribaldry; for although we shake our heads over the change, we are not unconscious of the manifold advantages of our new state. What we lose in generous impulse we more than gain in the habit of generously watching others; and the capacity to enjoy Shakespeare may balance a lost appetite for playing at soldiers.[1]

¶ Let us never fancy that the path of life is a path that steadily declines and slopes downward. It is true "heaven lies about us in our infancy." It is true that "the vision splendid" is often unveiled to young eyes. But it is still more true that heaven and God and "the vision splendid" are far nearer and closer to the man or woman who, in the battle of life, holds fast by truth and right and holiness, and pushes on, carrying a daily cross, along the rough, painful road of duty and faith and earnest living. It is a cruel mistake, and a most faithless one, to suppose that the beginning of life is better than the end of life, and that the days of youth are purer and better and of more value than the days of mature manhood and experienced old age.

¶ The David whom we love and admire, the David who has helped and enriched countless souls, and sent the echo of his song down through the centuries and won for himself deathless glory and fame in the Church of God, is not the boy of Bethlehem, dreaming in the fields and sitting by the well at the gate in all the charm of golden youth. The David who helps us and bids

[1] R. L. Stevenson, *Child's Play*.

us be of good cheer is the man of many trials and many troubles; the man of vast experience, much sorrow, much prayer; the man of a "broken and a contrite heart," wounded and showing the scars of many a fight. David is dear to us because he stands before us as one who, with infinite toil and labour, and with sweat of brain and heart, gained the mastery of himself; and who, in spite of defeats, failures, and sins, held fast, sometimes almost with desperation, by what is best and highest; and so found at last the true end of life, which is the knowledge and peace of God.[1]

¶ It is the experiences of our lives that are truly valuable. It is our sorrows and our joys, our exaltations and enthusiasms, that are really so much to us. Lives grow richer as they grow older. So long as a man really lives, he is continually establishing new relations with all the things about him. Every year some new object becomes representative and suggestive of some deep experience of life. One year his business becomes glorified with all the spiritual discipline of threatened failure and restored prosperity. Another year his family life is deepened and softened by bereavement. Again, his country's danger lifts patriotism into a passion. And yet again his body grows sacred to him by the mysterious touch of God in sickness. Always there is a new value coming into things which sinks the old and makes them new to him.[2]

4. When David realized the gain that the years had brought, he *thanked God* and was satisfied. For David the water of the Bethlehem well had become wine—the red wine of the sacrament of selfless love. He could no longer think of himself, but of these three devoted hearts and of the God to whom he felt he in the long-run owed the priceless draught of human affection which had so mightily refreshed his weary soul. Their unselfish readiness to sacrifice themselves in order to gratify a chance wish, uttered in a despondent hour, made him unselfish too—nay, made him more than unselfish, made him go straight to God in a fervour of thanksgiving, and talk about it to Him as if He would be sure to understand it, and recognize its true value. In that moment David rose again to the stature of a man of God. He could thank God for what the years had brought; he could thank God for the losses they had brought as well as the gains.

[1] W. Harrison. [2] Phillips Brooks.

An easy thing, O Power Divine,
To thank Thee for these gifts of Thine!
For summer's sunshine, winter's snow,
For hearts that kindle, thoughts that glow.
But when shall I attain to this—
To thank Thee for the things I miss?

For all young Fancy's early gleams,
The dreamed-of joys that still are dreams,
Hopes unfulfilled, and pleasures known
Through others' fortunes, not my own,
And blessings seen that are not given,
And never will be, this side heaven.

Had I too shared the joys I see,
Would there have been a heaven for me?
Could I have felt Thy presence near,
Had I possessed what I held dear?
My deepest fortune, highest bliss,
Have grown perchance from things I miss.

Sometimes there comes an hour of calm;
Grief turns to blessing, pain to balm;
A Power that works above my will
Still leads me onward, upward still:
And then my heart attains to this,—
To thank Thee for the things I miss.[1]

5. There is something better than looking back with longing to the days of youth. It is this—to realize that true life, the life of the soul, never grows old, although it grows up. Our true home never is, never was, amid the symbols and shadows of time, but in the grand reality of eternity. The well of Bethlehem in the morning—there is no turning back to it in the afternoon. There is a farther, a more glorious morning, a deeper, a nobler, a purer draught from the waters of God, the waters of rest. The soul in growing older is not farther from God than in the days of sweet innocence. To turn in simplest, most childlike trust to God, truth, heaven, wherever you are and however you are, is to drink deep of the water of ageless life.

[1] Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

Gray distance hid each shining sail,
  By ruthless breezes borne from me;
And, lessening, fading, faint and pale,
  My ships went forth to sea.

Where misty breakers rose and fell
  I stood and sorrowed hopelessly;
For every wave had tales to tell
  Of wrecks far out at sea.

To-day, a song is on my lips:
  Earth seems a paradise to me:
For God is good, and lo, my ships
  Are coming home from sea![1]

[1] George Arnold.

Hewing and Building.

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Hewing and Building.

And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready at the quarry: and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.—1 Kings vi. 7.

1. The erection of the Temple was, it is felt instinctively, the great event of Solomon's reign. Not that midnight cry for wisdom; not the marvellous insight which, as the reward of that petition, God gave him into the secrets of the universe; not the wealth and honour in which, by an unasked blessing, he excelled all his contemporaries; none of these has made him so essential a part of the world's history as the fact that he was the man who raised up the first sanctuary for the worship of the true God.

2. As the House of God, the Temple was the chief joy of Israel and the glory of the Jewish Economy. St. Paul, in his Epistles, frequently alludes to that Temple, and employs it as a figure or type or symbol to set forth some great Christian truth. Sometimes he speaks of the *individual Christian* being the temple of God. He admonishes the Corinthians not to degrade or pollute the body, for the reason that "the body is the Lord's." "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (1 Cor. vi. 19). Sometimes he speaks of the Church *collectively* as the temple of God. "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them" (2 Cor. vi. 16; 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17).

3. In the heart of the chronicle, in the midst of architectural details, which we pass with little interest, is this verse which captures the imagination and shapes before the mind the picture of a temple growing silently into shape and beauty, with no sound of hammer or axe or any tool of iron heard while it is

building. It is a verse which suddenly frees the fancy in the midst of the completely prosaic. It reads like an interruption in the narrative, and the Biblical critic tells us that it has either become misplaced or is an addition by a later hand. It matters little whether the hand that wrote it was the earliest chronicler or a later commentator. It was the hand of a genius. It added a touch which turns a builder's table of specifications into a poem and a parable. "The house was threescore cubits long and twenty cubits broad and thirty cubits high. The porch was twenty cubits long and ten cubits broad. The inner chamber was five cubits broad and the middle was six cubits," and so on; and the only person interested is the architect, who has the plans of a far finer building pigeon-holed at home. The rest of us are not wildly excited by cubic measures. This is the prose of the building trade. But here is poetry and mystery: "The house when it was in building," etc. This verse comes like a touch of magic, and you feel the silence and the mystery as of the city which the Apostle saw coming down from God out of heaven.

Now in the text two facts are mentioned about the building of the Temple: the stones were prepared beforehand in the quarry, and so the actual building was accomplished with no noise. Thus we have—

I. The House of God is Built of Prepared Stones.
II. The House of God is Built Silently.

I.

The House of God is Built of Prepared Stones.

1. There is one "sight" in Jerusalem, often left unvisited by those who go to the Holy City. This is the great cavern under a portion of the city, known locally as Solomon's quarries. The entrance to this cavern is found just outside the Damascus Gate, on the north side of the city, and opposite Jeremiah's Grotto. The entrance is very small and obscurely located. For some reason, the place is little thought of by the local guides; but it is certainly well worth a visit. The "quarries" are not a natural cavern, but a cavern made by the taking out of immense quantities

of rock. The cavern extends for a long distance under the city, gradually sloping towards the south. It is 700 feet to its inner end; it varies from 60 to 300 feet in width, and averages 30 feet in height, the roof being supported by large pillars of the native rock. In the walls and overhead the traces of chisels are everywhere to be seen, and the chips from the hewn rock lie thick under foot. In many places the stones have been left half cut out, and the marks of the chisel and pick are as fresh as if the quarrymen had only just left their work; even the black patches made by the smoke of their lamps are still visible. The best archæologists agree that there is no improbability in the supposition that the great stones used in the substructure of the Temple of Solomon and in its surrounding walls were obtained from this quarry and fitted for their places in this underground workshop. The stones were prepared in this quarry and in others, were made to the right shape and size, and were then taken to the Temple site; and the building went up from prepared material, without the sound of hammer or axe or any tool of iron while it was in building.

¶ As I wandered round the walls of Jerusalem with one who knew intimately all that is at present known of its antiquities, how well I remember the sudden surprise that came upon me when he said: "There you see those blocks, with huge chamfered edges, and rough middle dressings. They are by their tooled edges and the masons' marks, of which some have been discovered, probably, almost certainly, the work of Solomon's builders." There, now level with the ground, as Christ said they should one day be, and extending from forty to eighty feet below it, according to the disposition of the native rock underneath, was in very deed stone lying close to stone even as on that day when, as we read in the sixth chapter of the First Book of the Kings, "Solomon built the house, and finished it." It took one's breath away; such centuries had passed and the stones had not cried out, but to-day they were eloquent. And as I gazed upon those gigantic blocks of Judæan limestone, bedded together so nicely that a sixpence could not pass between, my thoughts naturally went off to the masons who built so wonderfully and laid the stones so well. In gazing I saw again the swart-faced builders of Solomon, and the dark-eyed, dark-bearded masons of Hiram who did hew the stones, and the "stone squarers" working so diligently with plumbline and square. But though about me the air seemed to

breathe the scent of the cedar and the fir from the great side galleries, the porches, and the chambers that Solomon built, and to feel the dazzle of the golden lilies and knops and pomegranates and the glory of the "palmtrees and cherubim," one could not forget the motive for all those wonderful buildings—those mighty stones which, you remember, so touched the heart of one of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, ten centuries after, that as he went out of the Temple he said, as we read in St. Mark xiii. 1, "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here"—one could not, I repeat, forget that that motive was worship and praise of the Invisible, the worship of Jehovah, the praise of the great I AM.[1]

2. The stones in the spiritual House of God are prepared beforehand. Believers having been hewn out from the quarry of humanity by the grace of God are called by St. Peter "living stones." They are not inert masses of rock, not senseless blocks of marble, but full of life, feeling, and action; and they are thus designated because Christ, as "the tried corner-stone," "the sure foundation," is called "a living stone," and diffuses His own life through all parts of the spiritual temple which rests on Him. So every stone in it, from the foundation to the top-stone, is made a precious, a glistering, a living stone, through the indwelling life of Jesus, the Prince of life. So long, then, as the soul of the believer rests on Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and on nothing else, it has spiritual Life. Build it upon any other foundation, and it is a senseless stone; only as laid by the Holy Ghost "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner-stone," can it receive in itself the life of Christ, and become through the impartation of His own vitality a living stone.

3. Yet how much spiritual trimming and dressing, how much hewing and squaring does he need to fashion him aright for the position which the Divine Architect intends he shall occupy hereafter! There are sharp angles of character to be rounded off; unsightly protuberances of conduct to be chipped away; many roughnesses of temper to be smoothed down; many flaws and cracks of mind and heart to be chiselled out; and then, when the general form of the stone is prepared, how much severe

[1] H. D. Rawnsley.

friction is required to give it the right polish, and bring out all its beauties, so that its smooth surface may fling back the rays of the Sun of righteousness!

¶ One would think, from such words as those of the text, that there was no room for struggle in the religious life, or in the conversion into that life. The whole building grows up softly, silently, almost mystically, and we are tempted to feel as if there were no sympathy in that temple with the wrestling of our hearts. Nay, but hast thou forgotten that the struggle was all past ere ever the building was begun? Forgotten that the stone was "made ready before it was brought thither"? What a world of meaning lies unspoken in that little clause! Before these stones came into unity they all existed in individual separation, in isolation, in solitude. Before they passed into the stage of silent building they had each to go through a process of noise and conflict, had each to be hewn into symmetry with its place in the coming temple. There is a great unrecorded battle of the spiritual life hinted at in this "making ready"; it is but a flash of thought, but it is a flash that lights up our whole experience and reveals us to ourselves. It tells us that the silence is not the first but the last thing, that there is a making ready for the symmetry ere the symmetry is reached. It tells us that Saul of Tarsus has his struggle ere the light from heaven breaks upon his view—that conflict where he finds it so hard to kick against the goads. It tells us that Nicodemus has his solitary walk by night ere he can take up the dead Christ from the shadow of the cross—that solitary walk wherein he feels deserted by the old and not yet convinced by the new.[1]

4. The greater part of the preparation to which we are subjected as professing Christians is of a disciplinary character, and hence is fitly represented by the axe, the hammer, and the tool of iron. Prosperity not only is the destruction of fools, but in the great majority of cases it hardens the heart of the nominal Christian, so that Christ Himself is forced to say, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" And for many hundreds of years, God by the voice of Jeremiah has complained, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice." Afflictions come more immediately to the heart, and operate with a more searching

[1] G. Matheson.

and purifying influence upon the life. They show a man his weakness and sinfulness; lay open the moral anatomy of his nature; subject to severest test his principles of action, and cause him to retire into the chambers of his soul and learn there, in the light of the Bible and the light of conscience, his relations and duties to God and man. Now the axe seems driven into the root of his happiness; now he is broken as a block of granite under the blows of the hammer of God's word; and now the iron of a sore adversity has entered into his soul, and he feels himself stricken, smitten, and afflicted. In these dispensations, however severe, he is being fitted by the hand of God Himself for a place in glory.

¶ Marvellously comforting is this message to many a struggling soul. Art thou perplexed by thine inward disquietude? Art thou tossed upon a sea of doubt and wrapt in a mist of uncertainty? Art thou experiencing the accusations of a conscience that speaks louder and louder every day? Say not that, therefore, there is no place for thee within the silence of the mystic temple; it is just therefore that there *is* a place for thee. This struggle of thine is thy making ready. This loudness of thy conscience is the hewing of thy hardness into symmetry—the symmetry that will fit thee to be a stone in the temple of Christ. Thy solitude is not the neglect of thee, thy struggle is not the absence of thy God from thee; it is the eye of thy God *upon* thee. He has taken thee up to the wilderness that He may make thee ready. All the pain He sends thee is the sign of His interest in thee, the proof that He is preparing thee for the symmetry of the temple of peace. Thy wilderness is the vestibule into thy heaven. Bless the Lord, O my soul.[1]

'Tis the Master who holds the chisel;
He knows just where
Its edge should be driven sharpest
To fashion there
The semblance that He is carving;
Nor will He let
One delicate stroke too many
Or few be set
On forehead, or cheek, where only
He sees how all
Is tending—and where the hardest
The blow should fall

[1] G. Matheson.

Which crumbles away whatever
Superfluous line
Would hinder His hand from making
The work divine.

With tools of Thy choosing, Master,
We pray Thee, then,
Strike just as Thou wilt; as often,
And where, and when
The vehement stroke is needed.
I will not mind,
If only Thy chipping chisel
Shall leave behind
Such marks of Thy wondrous working
And loving skill
Clear carven on aspect, stature,
And face, as will,
When discipline's ends are over,
Have all sufficed
To mould me into the likeness
And form of Christ.

5. Three processes are mentioned here through which the living stones pass to be prepared for their place in the House.

(1) First, there is the process of *testing*. There were thousands of stones in the distant quarries that had been tried and cast back into the pile of refuse — some that had been tried and tried again and at last cast aside, having proved unworthy of a place in the Temple.

¶ One of the most awfully serious views of life to me is that each one of us is being constantly tested and proved, that we are every day revealing ourselves, disclosing what there is in us to God and the universe. We are every hour, as it were, under His hammer. He tries us, proves us, to see whether we are fit and willing to be prepared for the eternal temple, or fit only to be cast away for ever with the trash, the rubbish, the sweepings of the world.[1]

¶ Even in our surface worldly-wise opinions, which float lightly on the stream of thought, we admit much of this. We admit that the test of faith in anything is willingness to suffer. The test of courage is when a real occasion calls for it. The test of patriotism is readiness to make sacrifice for country. Lukewarm

[1] E. H. Evans.

adherence to a party or a cause is a source of weakness. All the fighting has to be done by men of other mould. When victory in anything is assured, there are plenty of brazen throats to scream hallelujah and brazen brows seeking to be crowned by the laurels of triumph. The faith which costs nothing is worth nothing. It does not go deep enough. Some men, as the Scottish proverb goes, will put their hand twice to their bonnet for once to their pouch. It does not cost much to salute a man or a scheme. The test of all manner of devotion must be practical. The lady in the age of chivalry set her knight-errant to do some difficult task which he accomplished for love of her or died in the attempt. The principle is right, though the applications were often absurd.[1]

(2) Next, there is the preparation proper, the *hewing and polishing*. There were 80,000 hewers of stone and wood in the distant mountains of Lebanon, and some stones prepared for the foundations were over five yards long. When the stone was found to be sound—without a single flaw—it was then handed over to be made ready, by the hammer, the file, the saw, and the iron tools. So is it with the Christian when he has obeyed God by believing in Jesus. He has passed the first process; he is then handed over, as it were, to be made "meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light." He receives the title to the inheritance the day he obeys and believes; but he must be polished, sanctified, before he is "meet." And this making ready, the lopping off of the rough corners, the polishing with the tools of iron, is often a rough work, hard to bear.

We ask, under our trials, if God loves us; now that we are His acknowledged children, why is it that He does not keep away from us the griefs and sorrows? why the many afflictions even of the righteous? Why? Because this is a world of "making ready." We are here in the land of the quarries, the land of the tools of iron, the axe and the hammer, and the rasp and the file. The land where "stones are being made ready." We have all of us some rough side that needs polishing, a temper that needs smoothing down, a passion that must be lopped off. There is much work yet to do before we are ready for "the inheritance of the saints in *light*." We cannot be taken to the "light" until we are "made ready."

We are here to be sanctified as well as saved, and our sancti-

[1] Hugh Black, *Comfort*, 60.

fication is far more important in the sight of God now than our *present happiness*. Our heavenly Father loves us enough to keep away from us all trouble and anxiety, but He knows that if all things were made pleasant to us here, we would soon forget Him —and heaven. Those are very expressive words in the 55th Psalm, "Because they have no changes, therefore they *fear* not God." Their life here is so smooth and prosperous, they have no changes, it is always the same with them; therefore they "fear not God."

¶ There is more to be said about the nature of trial than that it is a test. The strain is not put merely to see who will stand and who will fail. We see this further use in it, that it is not merely to try good but to increase good. Strength comes through the strain. "The bruising flails of God's corrections" are meant to thresh out the useless chaff, and give value to the wheat. Tribulation is not merely trial, but *discipline*, and occasion for growth, to deepen faith and enrich life. The first fresh rapture has to be transmuted into the crowning quality of endurance. Discipline is not exhausted either by the thought of punishment or by the thought of testing, but is itself a means of giving power. There comes the new strength of a surrendered life, gaining in power and in beauty.[1]

¶ I remember, when apprenticed to a draper as a very young lad, I complained that I was obliged to do all the drudgery—that I had to pull down the shutters, and dust the shop, and clean the windows—while the other young men looked on. My mother, wiser than I, consoled me: "They have all gone through the drudgery before you, and if you will only keep on, you'll reach their position."[2]

¶ Men continually quarrel with this world for being what God designed it to be—a workshop, a timber-yard, a stone-quarry, a forge. When you go to a manufactory, you go prepared for noise and heat; you arm yourself to bear fatigue, and you seek to deaden the sensitiveness of your auditory nerves. Noise and dust you know to be inseparable from such places, and you make your arrangements accordingly for meeting them there. And shall I enter the solemn workshop of Life, and marvel that it is no summer arbour of delight, no shady bower of rest? Shall I complain that its dust turns me sick, and beg that its hammers would cease ringing, to rest my poor aching head? Verily no. The living stones of human hearts must be squared at any cost: the axe of

[1] Hugh Black, *Comfort*, 63. [2] E. H. Evans.

affliction must fall, and the hammer of chastening ring, whether I am able to endure their piercing tones or not. The temple must be set up in Jerusalem, and, in order to it, here on Lebanon must be heard the groans of repentance, the wailings of bereavement, ay, and even the piercing death-cry itself.[1]

¶ We do best when we take it in faith, bearing as firmly as we may the bereavements, disappointments, the bodily afflictions, the mental strain, the spiritual oppression, doubt, loneliness, which God sees fit to use as the instruments of our discipline. We do best when we endure these patiently and in trustful simplicity, believing in the good which they are to accomplish. For

> . . . Life is not as idle ore,
>
> But iron dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
> And batter'd with the shocks of doom,
>
> To shape and use.

(3) Lastly, there is the process of *conveying* to the destined place. The materials for this temple were collected from all parts. The workmen of the king of Tyre were cutting the cedar and fir in Lebanon, and squaring, boring, chiselling, and mortising all manner of beams. Thousands of men were quarrying stone, others were rafting the whole along the sea to Joppa, others teaming it up to Jerusalem. The huntsmen were gathering skins in the east, the miners searching for gold in Ophir, and the Jewish maidens preparing the hangings of silk in Jerusalem; each working at his or her own special work, but all for the Temple. When they were ready, they were to be brought from all parts to the builders on Mount Moriah. So to-day men and women are being got ready for God's home above. Then, from all quarters of the globe, death bears them above. There is no making complete the family gathering, no finishing the heavenly temple, without the aid of death.

¶ A man who occupied a prominent ecclesiastical position in the north of England, the late Dean of York, was lying on his death-bed. One day he said to me that the kindness of so many friends almost broke his heart. "Well," I said, "it would be strange if, considering what you have done for others, our hearts

[1] G. Dawson.

were not concerned for you." For a moment he seemed pleased, but almost instantly he said sternly, "Never speak like that again!" "Why?" I asked with surprise. "When you come to lie where I am, you will know that there is nothing you have done worth looking at. The only comfort for a dying man is the infinite mercies of his Saviour. I thank God it is perfect peace."[1]

II.

The House of God is Built Silently.

We have already seen that in the New Testament sometimes the individual Christian and sometimes the Church is spoken of as the Temple of God. We shall accordingly speak first of the silent building up of character in the individual, and next of the silent progress of the Kingdom of God.

i. The Silent Building of Character.

We know that in our midst are lives and characters immature and unshaped, but every day and every week they are adding something to themselves which will determine the quality and power of their maturity. Every father and mother, every Sunday-school and day-school teacher, has been made to feel over and over again how subtle, secret, and silent is the process by which the boy becomes the man, the girl the woman, and character takes its shape. We may do our careful utmost to bring that raw and malleable material under the best moulding influences we know, but with what result we can seldom or never see at the time. All that is given us are fleeting signs which sometimes encourage and sometimes depress, and which may be wholly illusive and unreliable; but all the time we know that the building of the house of life is going forward, and the young builders are gathering material from many quarries and incorporating it into the fabric. Silently and ceaselessly goes forward the shaping of life, as Troy in its legendary beginning—

Like a mist, rose into towers.

1. Think first of the formative years. What is it you see when you look deep into the eyes of a child? You see the soul

[1] Canon G. Body.

going out with an eager demand, asking of all things material for life. That is the child's demand. He asks life of thee. There is a perfect openness, a receptiveness, which will not be his in later years. This is the child mind, eager to learn, and with a vast hospitality to thoughts too great to be grasped, but which he will grapple himself to by the one fragment he can lay hold upon: an earnest pressing to the heart of things, and an unconsciousness of all human substitutes for the intimacy of personal knowledge. Worldly considerations are nothing to him, deference to prejudice he knows nothing of. He is just a living soul, loyal to question, impulse, aspiration, with a heart and mind that want to know and possess, and are always listening and always taking. And with this receptiveness there is a huge and pathetic confidence. He takes from anybody, he takes anything, quite unconscious that men often invent formulas only to cover ignorance, lay down dogmas only to shelter their hesitations, and set up conventions out of fear or indolence of investigation. The child knows nothing of this, and with a mighty confidence takes what is given; for as yet he has no experience to test it by. It is the plastic time, but it is the determinative time.

¶ "As the twig is bent, the tree inclines," runs the saying; and it is truer than most proverbs. We know that its philosophy is true, and yet we do not habitually recognize how true. Sometimes some accident or incident makes us realize how large a part of what makes us to-day became part of us in careless days of childhood. We gain experience and knowledge in manhood and womanhood, our estimates and standards change, our views broaden in some ways and contract in others, but when we come to regard ourselves closely, how often it appears beyond dispute that a very large and permanent part of our mental and moral furnishing became ours when we were children.[1]

I found a piece of plastic clay
And idly fashioned it one day,
And as my fingers pressed it still,
It moved and yielded to my will.
I came again when days had passed,
The piece of clay was hard at last;
The form I gave it still it bore,
But I could change that form no more.

[1] T. Yates.

I took a piece of living clay
And gently formed it day by day,
And moulded, with my power and art,
A young child's soft and yielding heart.
I came again when years had gone,
It was a man I looked upon;
He still that early impress bore,
And I could change him never more.

¶ The time of suffering, when you were beaten on the anvil, is justified by the appearance of the result. Character has acquired a new power of endurance, and become tough and smooth as hammered steel. The natural man suffers, like those trees of Lebanon when the bark is peeled off, and he feels the edge of saw and chisel; but he is of no use in the spiritual temple till these have done their work. In short, the strength, the stability, the uprightness, the graces of charity, of sympathy, which form and adorn a human soul at its last and best, are ever prepared amid trial and pain, and put together in silence.[1]

2. Notice next the materials out of which character is made. The materials come from far. Other people have had much to do with making us what we are. "The house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready at the quarry." To begin with, there is the ancestral quarry, the human stuff and stock out of which the child gets his first materials for the house of life. Think of the body. Happy the child who has as his birthgift a fit physical basis for the character he must build for himself, who starts with the five senses unclogged which are the gateways through which journey all earth's sights and sounds and thoughts. But think more of the mind. The mind of the child is not a blank piece of paper; its history did not begin with its first conscious impression. The "*tabula rasa*" idea has vanished before a larger revelation of the store of past inheritance and experience which each child carries with it into the world.

(1) So there is first the quarry we call *Heredity*. The child does not start clear. It finds, like Solomon, materials left by its father. It is handicapped with poor stuff or enriched with capital piled up by the effort of many generations. The "heir of all the ages," as he lies on his mother's knee, has in every eddy of his blood, in every pulsation of his heart, in every throb of his

[1] W. Granger.

nerves, in every tremor of his brain, the memorial of a human past.

(2) There is also the quarry we call *Environment.* The child is building from the world outside self the fibre of its own being, the structure of the inner mind. Whittier describes in a poem the development of the universe in the mind of a child, and tells how, as the child goes forth from day to day, the wind and the sun, the procession of the cattle with their bells, the music and the salt scents of the sea, become not only memories of the child, but part of the child. The environment of the child in Whittier's poem contrasts greatly with that of most children. Most are town children, perhaps in some ways to their gain; but the gain is superficial, while the loss is deep and the perils are increased. The loss lies in the absence of real intimacy with Nature; the peril is that with too little of Nature there is too much of man.

¶ Man is not the creature, but the architect of circumstance. It is character which builds an existence out of circumstance. Our strength is measured by our plastic power; from the same materials one man builds palaces, another hovels; bricks and mortar are mortar and bricks, until the architect can make them something else.[1]

(3) There is the quarry of *Christian Faith and Experience.* We believe that the stone made ready at the quarry of Christian faith and experience is the material children need most, and that the issue will prove it both by its beauty and by its stability. The great attributes of God appeal naturally to the child; the life and character of Jesus are perfectly intelligible and endlessly fascinating to the child, and the attraction of the Gospels, if you do not mar its effect by doctrinal subtleties, is irresistible.

Souls are built as temples are—
Sunken deep, unseen, unknown,
Lies the sure foundation stone,
Then the courses framed to bear
Lift the cloisters pillared fair,
Last of all the airy spire,
Soaring heavenward, higher and higher,
Nearest sun and nearest star.

[1] Carlyle.

Souls are built as temples are—
Inch by inch in gradual rise
Mount the layered masonries.
Warring questions have their day,
Kings arise and pass away,
Labourers vanish one by one,
Still the temple is not done,
Still completion seems afar.

Souls are built as temples are—
Here a carving rich and quaint,
There the image of a saint;
Here a deep-hued pane to tell
Sacred truth or miracle;
Every little helps the much,
Every careful, careless touch
Adds a charm or leaves a scar.

Souls are built as temples are—
Based on truth's eternal law,
Sure and steadfast, without flaw.
Through the sunshine, through the snows,
Up and on the building goes;
Every fair thing finds its place,
Every hard thing lends a grace,
Every hand may make or mar.

¶ Which has the greater influence in the making of character, heredity or training?—the influences before birth, or those after? The question has been asked by scores of persons. It is surprising how often it has been met with hesitancy, as though a thing not thought into. And surprising, too, how indecisive the replies usually are.

Yet careful thought makes it plain, and then plainer, that while heredity is great beyond any power of calculation, training is infinitely greater. Or it would be better said thus: training may be made infinitely greater. Training can be made the greater, yet with the vast majority, as a matter of fact, it is not. The bent before birth, and the chance, weedy growth after, actually make up the character of the great crowd, with training, properly so called, playing no part, because it has no chance.

Training is by far the greater in its possible power. Heredity, with the chance environment it has stumbled across, has actually been the most potent factor, and is. If the start be early enough, heredity can be wholly overcome by training, though it rarely is.

In many instances it is partially overcome. With the vast crowd, the child runs wild like an unkempt vine, or rank weed, and so heredity plus whatever is absorbed by mere chance decides the life.

Bad blood is bad. Bad training is yet worse. Good blood is good, but good training is better. It is easier to train where there is good blood. But then most blood is good, though the pedigree is not recorded. It is rather startling to remember that good training with bad or not-good blood, if you can begin early enough, will give a better life than the best of blood with bad training, or with the shiftless, weedy no-training.[1]

ii. The Silent Building of the Church.

The Church of God is spoken of sometimes as on earth, sometimes as in heaven. Let us take it in its entirety. The real end for which God hath chosen us in Christ Jesus before the world began, and fitted us on earth by His providential dispensations, is, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him."

This recapitulation of all things in Christ is to be effected by building all things on Christ as the sure foundation which God Himself has laid in Zion; and Christians, as living stones chosen of God and precious, are, in the language of St. Paul, built upon the foundation of the apostles, "in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This structure the same apostle designates in another place as "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The spiritual temple will in its day of completion be far nobler than that of Solomon. It will never be pillaged, as that was when Shishak, king of Egypt, came and took away its treasures—for of the unseen temple it is said no thief can break through and steal. It will never be polluted, as Zion's Temple was by the wickedness of Manasseh—because "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither worketh abomination." And it can never be destroyed, as Solomon's was when Nebuzaradan burnt the House of the Lord—for it is built of living stones which can never perish.

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Home Ideals*, 236.

1. Now notice that for the building of the Church of God hewers are needed as well as builders.

(1) The building of the Temple of God is largely *unseen work.* Most of the work of Solomon's Temple was done where it would not show for much. Workmen were in the quarry cutting and shaping those stupendous stones whose size is still the wonder of the world, and whose accuracy of fit is so exquisite that the blade of a knife can hardly be inserted between them. Other labourers in the plain between Succoth and Zarthan were forming clay moulds in which the molten metal might be shaped. Others were away in the forest of Lebanon, where axes were ringing, and giant trees were falling. Others, again, brought these down as lumber, some bearing burdens, and others placing the rollers on which the heavy masses of wood and stone were brought to their appointed places. The worshippers in the completed Temple probably never saw these men; their names were unknown to them as to us. Their work was like that of the sculptors of those marble figures which adorn the roof of Milan Cathedral, or like that of the carvers of stonework in the marvellous roof of King's College Chapel, Cambridge—splendid work done by unknown workers.

¶ My guide and friend took me round the north-eastern angle of the Temple area and by the wall till nearly opposite the well-known gate of Jeremiah—a hundred paces from the gate through which Stephen passed to die, two or three hundred yards at most from that "Green hill far away, without a city wall," which is, even to-day, in shape so "like a skull." He stopped close beside the wall that Saladin built—"You see that hole in the earth? A wounded partridge was the means of its discovery a few months ago. Follow me!" We entered a long sloping gallery that led, or seemed to lead, right under the city walls in the direction of the Temple. Right and left, as the lamps flared and showed us the vast caverns, we saw evidences of the masons who had chipped their stones to size, detached them from their bed in the quarry, and worked them and tooled them into squares. Deeper and further we went into the cool darkness. Our guide put up his torch and showed us little nicks or niches in the still upstanding blocks, blackened with soot. "You know what those were for?" he said. "Those were the niches hewn out by the men of Hiram and Solomon of old time, on which to place their little earthen lamps while they laboured at the stone."[1]

[1] H. D. Rawnsley.

¶ I believe that much of the best work accomplished for the world, and for the Church, is never seen or heard of at the time. But the Lord is mindful of His own; He remembereth His children. And if He sent His angel to show us where true and lasting service is being done, possibly He would not lead us to magnificent buildings, or to stately worship, or to popular preaching. Perhaps He would draw aside the veil which hides a Christian home, and show us a mother patient with her wayward lad, pleading with him, praying for him; seeking by her gentle, watchful love to shape his character to true nobility, that she may present him at last as one of God's polished stones. He might show us a Christian going up the creaking staircase to some wretched attic, where a smile lights up the face of a dying man to whom the visitor speaks of a Saviour who is loving and of a heaven that is near. In that foul miserable room rests the foot of the ladder whose top is in heaven. Or possibly the angel might point us to a writer for the press, working far into the night, pale and tired, but penning words which will affect the world on the morrow—turning men from the love of war, rebuking iniquity in high places, and preparing the nation to choose the ways of righteousness, liberty, peace, and love.[1]

The hands that do God's work are patient hands,
And quick for toil, though folded oft in prayer;
They do the unseen work they understand
And find—no matter where.

The feet that follow His must be swift feet,
For time is all too short, the way too long;
Perchance they will be bruised, but falter not,
For love shall make them strong.

The lips that speak God's words must learn to wear
Silence and calm, although the pain be long;
And, loving so the Master, learn to share
His agony and wrong.[2]

(2) It is *varied work*. Had we been in Jerusalem, we should have noticed great differences between the kinds of work done. Some was arduous and mechanical, and some was very pleasant, giving opportunity for the exercise of artistic taste. Some was dignified and some was undignified. Still, every kind of work had its place. None could be neglected. The toil of the poor clay-

[1] A. Rowland. [2] William Ordway Partridge.

moulder was as necessary as the skill of the clever designer. It would be an onerous task even to mention all the forms of Christian activity. Suffice it to say that something can be done by every man, woman, and child for the establishment of Christ's Kingdom. Nor ought we to disregard such service as is quite outside the organization of the Church. For example, as Christian citizens we should take our share of responsibility, and, if need be, of reproach, in the defence of the liberties of the people, and in the furtherance of all legislation which will put down the prevalence of vice and wrong.

I stood by fields and farms where men
Were working with a glad intensity
As works the swallow bent to feed her young.
All knew they did not spend their strength for naught,
That every action was a seed whose plant
Should bloom in Heav'n and therefore used the spade
The axe, the saw, as tools wherewith to shape
Their individual hope. Although no minds
Were like, yet all were tempered to the whole
Intent of God—the many wires of one
Well-tunèd dulcimer. Thus all who shaped
Their proper Paradise laid stones upon
The walls of new Jerusalem. The Sun
Diffused a sacrificial will among
The very birds and beasts, who lent themselves
With conscious pleasure to the ends of man.
The tiller of the soil was gladdened by
The brown earth's charity, and he that hewed
The rock rejoiced together with the cliff
Whence it was hewn. The angels, lily fair
And swallow fleet, passed everywhere to help
Or guide at need.[1]

(3) All true work is *after the Divine plan.* The work of Solomon's builders, however widely distributed, however secretly done, was all tending towards an appointed end—the completion of a Temple, in which God would be worshipped, and where He would reveal Himself. That building existed in the mind of the Master-Builder before it had an actual existence; for an architect not only draws plans, but makes a specification, and perhaps takes out his quantities; so that he thinks through the whole work and

[1] Anna Bunston, *The Porch of Paradise.*

knows its minutest details. It is so with the Great Architect, the Originator and Upholder of all things. The Divine purpose is controlling our activities, is appointing to each of us his responsibilities, and God will at last bring out of what appear to be confused and contradictory events "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

¶ God is a great executive, *the* great executive of the universe. He planned the vast scheme of worlds making up the universe, and every detail. The whole universe in its immensity, and the intricacy of its movements, is kept in motion by Him. And every detail, down to the smallest, the falling of one of the smallest birds, is ever under His thoughtful eye and touch. And He is our God. He has each of us on His heart.[1]

¶ This is the secret of giving dignity to trifles. As units they are insignificant; they rise in importance when they become parts of a plan.[2]

(4) And all true work is *painful work.* The thing that must instantly occur to us, the moment that we have read about the silent way in which this temple-building was prepared for and accomplished, is that, after all, the noise was not got rid of; but simply separated from the ultimate construction. You cannot quarry a stone without noise. No huge boulder was ever lifted out of its primeval bed or riven from its parent rock without blows and sweat and strain and thunderous percussion. No tree was ever felled without that sharp smiting and steady thud of the workman's axe which has made ten thousand forests ring. In preparing the metals which we employ in rearing any lowliest temple, with what a heat and noise those metals must be forged! Nay, if we could have been among the craftsmen at Mount Lebanon where the timbers of the Temple were prepared, or in the quarries where the stones for its foundations were hewn and dressed, we should have found there no lack of clamour, and strife, and unrest. No least detail of that holy and beautiful house was made ready save at the cost of countless blows, of manifold discussion, of ceaseless weariness and fatigue. Doubtless there were all the catastrophes, the maladjustments, the sacrifice of individual life or limb to a great undertaking that

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Service*, 214.
[2] F. W. Robertson, *Life and Letters*, 209.

there are in similar undertakings to-day. The reason why "there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building," was because for days and weeks and months beforehand there had been incessant noise, untiring toil, infinite and undiscouraged pounding and smoothing and planing and hammering almost night and day. And do you suppose there was nothing more? The men who built the Temple were not angels, but children of a race trained by long bondage to the chain and the lash. Pharaoh's taskmasters had beaten them when the tale of bricks was short. Is it likely that Solomon's taskmasters were persons of such pre-eminent gentleness and infinite patience that they never struck a blow or spoke a harsh word? If we could have the unwritten history of that splendid building I presume we should find that its stones were moistened more than once with the salt tears of workmen who had always done their best, or who, striving to do it, had not always and instantly achieved the best result. This huge task was not accomplished without cost; and here, as always in the achievement of any great work, the costliest expenditure was not in money, but in human sweat and in human sorrow.

Your tears unheeded, and your prayers made nought,
Thus and no otherwise through all have wrought,
That if, the while ye toiled and sorrowed most
The sound of your lamenting seemed all lost,
And from my land no answer came again,
It was because of that your care and pain
A house was building, and your bitter sighs
Came hither as toil-helping melodies,
And in the mortar of our gem-built wall
Your tears are mingled mid the rise and fall
Of golden trowels tinkling in the hands
Of builders gathered wide from all the lands.—
—Is the house finished? Nay, come help to build
Walls that the sun of sorrow once did gild
Through many a bitter morn and hopeless eve,
That so at last in bliss ye may believe;
Then rest with me, and turn no more to tears,
For then no more by days and months and years,
By hours of pain come back, and joy passed o'er
We measure time that was—and is no more.[1]

[1] William Morris.

2. But more especially we are expected to observe how *silently* the building proceeds. The silence amid which the building of Solomon's Temple was carried on was partly due to the reverential feeling in which that holy work was undertaken. The deepest emotions in the human heart are generally the quietest. Our profounder feelings shrink from babble and noise. If we stand before a masterpiece of art and try to take in the harmonies of colour, or the symmetry of form, the frivolous remarks of a companion distress us. If we walk in the depths of a forest glade, or if we delight our eyes with the falling of gleams and of shadows upon the sward till we are lost in a pleasant day-dream, an incursion of jocund excursionists is resented as being almost a sacrilege. If we have to say farewell to friends we love, and the hour of parting, long-dreaded, has come at last, we feel that it is not a time for fluent talk, or for sparkling fun, but rather for the silent grip of the hand and the tearful "God bless you!" And when we enter some stately cathedral, rich in solemn associations, it is natural that we should be hushed and quiet.

Thus the rearing of the Temple is not so much an example for literal imitation as it is a prophecy of ultimate realization. There must have been a reason for that peculiar and exceptional method of building which was adopted in the case of the Temple, and that reason must have been a Divine one. It did not occur to this semi-barbarous people to build the Temple in this way. The method was revealed to them. What was its reason? Doubtless, in the first place, to educate a race with imperfect ideas of reverence into a higher conception of the sacredness of Divine things. The average Jew entered the Temple with a deeper awe when he remembered the august sanctities with which its erection had been hedged about.

In silence mighty things are wrought,—
Silently builded, thought on thought,
  Truth's temple greets the sky;
And like a citadel with towers,
The soul with her subservient powers
  Is strengthened silently.

Soundless as chariots on the snow
The saplings of the forest grow
  To trees of mighty girth;

Each nightly star in silence burns,
And every day in silence turns
The axle of the earth.

The silent frost with mighty hand
Fetters the rivers and the land
With universal chain;
And smitten by the silent sun,
The chain is loosed, the rivers run,
The lands are free again.

O Source unseen of life and light,
Thy secrecy of silent might
If we in bondage know,
Our hearts, like seeds beneath the ground,
By silent force of life unbound,
Move upwards from below.

And if our hearts well rooted be,
Their love, like sap within the tree,
With silent quickening moves;
Enlarged and liberated powers,
More light and balmier warmth are ours,
And God His presence proves.

O Saviour, who, that silence keeps,
But sometimes at the story weeps
Of all that he has known?
That we are what we are, how strange!
How gradual the silent change
By which our souls have grown![1]

(1) There is a certain sacredness in silence; reverence is ever quiet. In a room where one is lying dying, whoever enters, by a natural instinct treads softly and speaks low. From our earliest years we have been taught that in a church, where reverence is due to the sacred functions and uses of the building, our behaviour ought to be the reverse of loud and boisterous. And this, which early training and habit have made a second nature to us even in respect of buildings which in themselves are not fitted to inspire awe, or even respect, is felt to be natural and instinctive when the church, by its structure, possesses that

[1] Thomas Toke Lynch, *The Rivulet*, 110.

power. In an old Gothic church or cathedral, where the height, the gloom, the mass, the antiquity, all at once impress one, every reverent-minded person will experience an instinctive repulsion to frivolity or clamour. And as we, in God's house, in recognition of His holy Name and worship, restrain ourselves from loud speech and secular noises, so on the other hand the vast and impressive silences of Nature may at times convey to us a sense of the presence of God. In mountain solitudes on an early summer morn, there is such a silence as may be felt. It is Nature paying her devotions to her Maker. Such sounds as there are do not break the silence, they only make it audible—the whisper of a breeze in the grass, the murmur of water from among the trees. It is as if Nature were holding her breath, yet finding just voice enough to say, "The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

¶ When God created the heavens and the earth there was heard no sound of hammer or axe. The slow-revolving ages, the six grand epochs with their alternate lights and shadows, graduated one into the other, marking off His successive creative acts. We speak of the creative *fiat* as if God did, with an audible voice, call out of nothing the things which are.

> He said, Let there be light!
> Grim Darkness felt His might
> And fled away.
> Then startled seas and mountains cold
> Shone forth all clad in blue and gold
> And cried, 'Tis day! 'tis day!

One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,
One lesson which in every wind is blown,
One lesson of two duties kept at one
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—

Of toil unsever'd from tranquillity;
Of labour, that in lasting fruit outgrows
Far noisier schemes, accomplish'd in repose,
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry.

Yes, while on earth a thousand discords ring,
Men's fitful uproar mingling with his toil,
Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,

Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting;
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.[1]

(2) This is God's method everywhere, not only in Nature but also in History and in Grace. It is His method in History. History as written is for the most part the history of what made a noise. The sound of warriors rushing to battle, the clashing of armour, the groans of the conquered, and the shouts of the conqueror fill our ears. Take up any ordinary English History, and is it not so? Does it not concern itself mainly with the movements of kings and earls and generals, and a few prominent men in Church and State who did something illustrious? And yet it is evident that these were at no time the whole of life. The vast body of life is always unhistoric; the quiet world is not reported because it is quiet; and yet it is in this region that much of the best life has been lived.

¶ The landing of Cæsar with his hosts in Britain was not so significant an event as the landing of St. Augustine bearing a white Christ on a silver cross. The marching forth to the Crusades of Richard Cœur de Lion was not so important in its ultimate issues as the quiet demand of Stephen Langton in the meadow at Runnymede. The victories of Drake upon the high seas were of less real moment than the embarking of a few pilgrims from Delft Haven in search of religious freedom. The charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava was not so worthy of immortality in song as the play of a bare-legged lad in an English village, who at about that time was making clay engines furnished with hemlock sticks for pipes. The best history of Anglo-Saxon civilization is Green's *History of the English People*, which is constructed on the assumption that the victories of peace are more renowned than those of war.[2]

¶ The oak grows silently, in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes; and the oak announces itself when, with far-sounding crash, it *falls*. How silent too was the planting of the acorn; scattered from the lap of some wandering wind! Nay, when our oak flowered, or put on its leaves (its glad Events), what shout of proclamation could there be? Hardly from the most observant a word of recognition. These things *befell* not, they were slowly *done*; not in an

[1] Matthew Arnold. [2] D. J. Burrell.

hour, but through the flight of days: what was to be said of it? This hour seemed altogether as the last was, as the next would be.[1]

(3) In Grace. The beginning of the Christian life is commonly without observation. It is true that Saul of Tarsus was felled to the earth, blinded by a sun-burst, and addressed by a voice from heaven. But even of this case it is written that those that were with him saw the light but heard not the voice. The operation of the Spirit in the human heart is not with violence. He cometh down as rain upon the mown grass. To the majority of believers their passing out of darkness into the light is as when the traveller crosses the tropics; he cannot mark the instant. We are not scourged but wooed into the Divine arms. I have drawn thee, He says, with the cords of a man.

¶ The best penitents are those whose penitence does not wear out, but is always an under-current in their daily lives. You call him a fool who starts for a long race at his greatest speed, and he who is most demonstrative in his first repentance will often be found afterwards among the backsliders.

Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng;
They will condense within thy soul,
And change to purpose strong.

¶ As quietness is the mark of the true life, so will it mark its close. As the most beautiful sunset brings peace rather than excitement, even so will be the laying down of life. Nay, inasmuch as disease is painful and the physical wrench often keen, we may say that the afterglow is brighter than the sunset itself. But, in spite of pain, the death itself is peaceful. There is little triumph in the Christian death-bed, but there is peace.

And I would pass in silence, Lord,
No brave words on my lips,
Lest pride should cloud my soul, and I
Should die in the eclipse.

But when, and where, and by what pain,
All this is one to me;
I only long for such a death
As most shall honour Thee.

[1] Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, bk. ii. ch. 1.

(4) And so, finally, in silence does the Kingdom of God come. It "cometh not with observation." This is true of its progress in the world. God is in "the still small voice," not in the wind or in the earthquake or the fire. Christ's own career, how silent it was! The spread of the Kingdom was unnoticed by the world's great ones—Cæsars, philosophers, patricians—and it silently grew underground. So is it with the consummation of the Kingdom in glory. Earth is the Lebanon to which Heaven shall furnish the Jerusalem. Time is the noisy workshop of Eternity.

Halting between Two Opinions.

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HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

And Elijah came near unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.—1 Kings xviii. 21.

I.

THE SITUATION.

1. THIS scene is one of the most memorable and striking in history. It represents one of those great culminating points when life suddenly becomes dramatic, when, as it were, the confused groups of men and women on the stage of life suddenly shift themselves into place and position, and the curtain rises on the acts of a great tragedy. Such culminations occur also in the individual life, when the still river of our days deepens, and rushes on in loud thunder, and all our scattered energies become concentrated in one vast struggle. In such moments life is felt to be infinitely significant, and we know that it fulfils itself in the open eye of the angel-crowded heavens. In such moments the character of coming centuries is determined, and individual destiny is sealed and fixed.

2. From the challenge of Elijah to the falling of the fire from heaven, the interest grows and the excitement deepens. It was one of the most memorable national convocations ever held in Israel. Old men were there, and they could not remember such a bitter time in the nation's history. For years no rain had fallen at the appointed seasons, and the land was literally burnt up with the drought. By famine and hunger God had appealed to the conscience of the nation, and the appeal had apparently been in vain. They had not risen up in wrath and repentance to cast the new and false religion out of the land.

Fear of the king and queen and priest had deterred them. Fashion ruled them even in their misery. Lack of conviction, mental and spiritual instability, had been their undoing. Since the cruel famine began, Elijah had been in hiding, and there had been no decisive voice ringing out clearly for Jehovah and His cause. Now he has come forth from his retirement. It is at his instance that this assembly has been convened; and by his lips, and by the manifestation of His own might, Jehovah is about to make His final appeal to them. They would see such a sight that day as would, for a time, drive all hesitation out of their hearts, and force from each one of them, in the face of Ahab and the masterful priests of Baal, the confession, "The Lord, he is the God."

3. How the pulse quickens as we read the story! In his splendid isolation stands Elijah against king, court, and nation. For three years he has been a hunted fugitive; for three years Jezebel has enjoyed her wicked triumph; but this one man is unsubdued and unsubduable. At last he comes forth from his desert, and he comes like a thunderbolt. He bars the way of the king's chariot with a gesture, and silences him with one stern accusation: "Thou and thy father's house have made Israel to sin!" Never was the fearlessness of right so splendidly illustrated, or the impotence of evil so conclusively exposed. The hunter is dumb before his prey; the tyrant quails before his victim. There is a royalty in righteousness before which all other royalty is but tinsel; there is a supremacy in goodness which strikes the wicked dumb. Are you armed with that supremacy? Dare you stand fearless in the right though the heavens fall? Only then is man invulnerable. No one can defeat a man who is in the right. He may be a wild man of the desert and stand in tattered garb, but the chariots of wrong stop at his signal, and kings fear his face. When Elijah says, "Gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel," Ahab knows he must obey. So to Carmel Israel is gathered; there the broken altars are rebuilt, and there the pregnant question of the text is put to the vast multitude, who at last, when the fire of God descends, cry in fearful acquiescence not less than profound conviction, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

4. We have in this story of Elijah the record of the actual struggle which went on in Israel for at least fifty years between monotheism and idolatry, between puritanism and immorality, between the individual conscience and a despotism, between nationalism and foreign influences. Politically, socially, morally, and religiously Elijah represented and concentrated this struggle. No figure can be more grand than he, standing there alone, above the wild dance and crying of the priests of Baal! All the desert majesty is upon his face; all the glory of the great conception of one God, of one righteousness, is shining in his eyes; all the power of that thought, and of being the servant of its law, speaks in his iron attitude, even in his scornful speech—one against the world, and in mortal danger. There are few who have the steady inward power to take and keep that post. It needs courage, not only physical, but moral; it needs determined will; it needs intense conviction of the right of that for which the stand is made; it needs to have lived a blameless life. All these things belonged to Elijah, and their power in him made him majestic. Every soul that saw him that day, erect upon the rock, felt the strength and awe of his solitude and solitary faith in God flow like a river from him into their hearts. Every soul felt the baseness, in comparison with his stern manhood, of the court of Ahab; the noble contrast between his life and the luxury of the city, the indifference of the people, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Every one knew that there was in him something higher than earthly power; that the soul of man was here greater than the whole world. Each man, as the long hours of the day drew on, looked, knew that God was there, and said within his heart—

> "The Lord sat as king at the Flood;
> Yea, the Lord sitteth as king for ever."

5. It was not only human courage, will, and goodness that gave Elijah majesty. It was his faith in God. The man was possessed with God; behind him stood One whom none might see, but from whom streamed into His servant a spiritual might and inspiration. Elijah felt it; he knew that God had seized him, and he held to that faith with an intensity which made the man seem transfigured. This was the deep root of his courage, of his resolute will, of his scorn of all that men could do unto him,

of the certainty which made him mock his foes, and call on all the folk of Israel to watch the falling of the fire before it fell. This, too, was the root of his calm; all the day long, he waited, "like Teneriffe or Atlas, unremoved"; silent till the end; wrapt in his mantle, wrapt in faith; at peace in the midst of turbulence. Yet within him, born too of faith in God and hatred of oppression, of fierce contempt of evil, and love of his mighty thought that God was one and undivided, there was also that without which nothing great in morals, nothing sublime in spiritual life is ever wrought—passion at white heat; not bursting like that of the priests of Baal into wild cries, fanatic self-torture, and maddened dancing, but self-restrained and ruled, cool at its centre, mastered by will, inspired by a cause which in its origin was not his own, exalted by an idea the source of which was beyond himself in God.

6. We see Elijah stand here, in his full strength, on Carmel, at a great crisis in the fate of Israel. To that crisis he was equal; nay, in it he stood the first. By might of character he was then the monarch of all Israel; by the same might he swept into agreement with himself all the wavering, all the indifferent, all the worldly-minded. Against him stood the court, the weak king, the cruel and masculine queen, the whole body of the priesthood of Baal, the whole of the foreign and idolatrous tribe that had invaded the religion of Jehovah. That religion was often fierce and ruthless, but it was not foul. It held to two great principles of the deepest importance for the progress of the world. It held to the unity of God, and to justice and purity as the necessities for His worship. Both these principles were traversed by the worship of Baal and Astarte. On one side, then, was the crowd and the court, on the other only one man. But, lonely as he was, so great was his thought, and so grand his character, that Ahab trembled in his palace when he thought of Elijah, and Jezebel heard at night his voice, crying aloud her doom.

> And were it wisely done
> If we who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?
> If we whose virtue is so weak, should have a will so strong,
> And stand blind on the rocks to choose the right path from the wrong?

To choose, perhaps, a love-lit hearth instead of love and heaven,
A single rose for a rose-tree which beareth seven times seven?
Until in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best?

Dear God, and must we see
All blissful things depart from us or ere we go to Thee?
We cannot guess Thee in the wood, or hear Thee in the wind;
Our cedars fall around us ere we see the light behind.
Ay, sooth, we feel too strong, in weal, to need Thee on the road,
But woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on God!

7. It was the battlefield of two religions, and Elijah concentrated the struggle in the first words that fell from his lips, words marked as much by his stormy contempt as by his religious passion; words that carry their impassioned appeal to us: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

For mankind are one in spirit, and an instinct bears along,
Round the earth's electric circle, the swift flash of right or wrong;
Whether conscious or unconscious, yet Humanity's vast frame
Through its ocean-sundered fibres feels the gush of joy or shame;—
In the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal gain.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by for ever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shalt stand,
Ere the Doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against our land?
Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 'tis Truth alone is strong,
And, albeit she wander outcast now, I see around her throng
Troops of beautiful, tall angels, to enshield her from all wrong.[1]

[1] James Russell Lowell, *The Present Crisis.*

II.

Jehovah or Baal.

i. The Decision.

Elijah called the people to decide between two Gods—Jehovah and Baal. This decision has to be made in every age. Now Baal, the male, and Ashtaroth, the female, represented the fertilizing and productive principle in nature, and their worship was that of power. To the more cultivated and refined, it was simply a species of pantheism; to the multitude, it was what one has called "the worship of deified abundance, under a splendid and sensuous ceremonial"; or, as Maurice has put it, "The worship of Baal was the worship of power as distinguished from righteousness." But we are less concerned with what Baal stood for to the Israelites than with what "the God of this world" means to ourselves.

1. *The God of this world.* The God of this world takes various forms.

(1) Here is one form. We do not cast him into the form of a graven, or a molten image; we may not set him up in the "plains of Dura, in the province of Babylon," but we set him up in London, at the Stock Exchange. We have little images of him in our own houses, and we worship him with the "sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music," and we call him *Money!* We are great at the worship of Mammon. People never seem tired of burning incense to wealth. To-day, a man may be so despicable a creature that we would not demean ourselves by touching him with the extreme tip of our little finger. He suddenly becomes heir to ten thousand a year, and to-morrow we are only too glad to get into our carriage and call upon him. What has made the difference? He has become a successful "worshipper of the golden image," and we, as other high priests of this idolatry, are bound to fraternize with this excellent person! Who is he? "*The God of this World.*" The Baal of our day!

(2) Here is another "God of this world"; we set him up on a lofty tower of ivory, or we put him into one of our superb

equipages, and roll him through the street, with a four-in-hand, and we call him *Rank*! And everybody bows down and worships this God, as he passes along. Look at him there, as he goes along in all his splendour, and the votaries of this world bow down with profound obeisance, and do him honour!

(3) Here is another "God of this world"! We deck him with all kinds of silks, satins, and load him with jewellery, and we call him *Fashion*. We put him in our drawing-rooms; our *roués* are skilful in his worship, and women are specially devoted to him. If he makes us ridiculous it is no matter. Any kind of eccentricity is pardoned, even though our own tastes condemn us for the form our worship assumes, though our own reason may rise up against it, and we may sometimes say, as we look into our glass, "What a ridiculous, empty-headed, wax doll I have made of myself!" Yet in the very same moment we none the less eagerly offer our incense to the worship of the God that we have made.

(4) Here is another God. We beat drums, and we blow trumpets; we deck him in scarlet regimentals; and we write the name *Ambition* upon his brow, and fall down and worship him. What deity so great as this God? We honour him supremely; we are never tired of speaking about him; poets write of him; and philosophers go out of their way to make themselves ridiculous about him; even ministers of the gospel of peace can become eloquent in sounding forth the praises of what they are pleased to call "glory."

(5) Or it may be we call him *Pleasure*. He puts on the fool's mask, and wherever he goes eager crowds of admirers follow him. "There goes the God of this world." "Have you heard So-and-so? Go and hear him: why, you would die of laughing!" As though it were worthy of the dignity of humanity to lay itself out for levity; as though we were not frivolous enough by nature, but must needs pay our fellow-travellers on the broad road to make us more frivolous than we were before![1]

¶ Very powerfully has Watts embodied his idea of Mammon as the god of this world, in that telling picture which exhibits him to us as a king, sitting on a scarlet throne ornamented at the top with two skulls. His head, Midas-like, is encircled with a crown fashioned of a broad band of gold—with round golden

[1] Canon Hay Aitken.

coins standing up from it in imitation of the balls or strawberry leaves of a coronet. There is something indescribably mean and repulsive in his face, with square massive jaws—sordid, selfish mouth—flat nose, and bleared dead-blue eyes, full of cunning and deceit and all hardness, rising above a neck that wrinkles into gross folds like the skin of a rhinoceros. On each side above his head his hair rises up like a pair of asinine ears; and he is clothed with a gold tunic embroidered with patterns taken from the pursuits of wealth. One hand is grovelling among the money bags in his lap, and the other grasps the long tresses of a beautiful woman who has sold herself for gain, and whose green robe of freshness falls away from her. His foot, covered with blood-red hose, rests on the body of a naked youth who has been a devoted slave, and has been stamped into the mire by his bondage. In the background of the picture a crimson curtain falls down concealing the distant view, but disclosing immediately underneath it a smoking fire, emblematic of the fiery danger to which the lust of wealth exposes the soul that cherishes it. The commercial world is only too full of illustrations of the destructive flame which this spark of inward fire kindles, for no one can be covetous at heart without his covetousness finding outward expression in his life.[1]

2. Our choice is between the God of this world and Him who is called "the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Why should we choose the latter?

(1) *He is one.*—Suppose that we worshipped a plurality of gods, as the heathen nations do and ever have done; then we have at once a divided duty: one man chooses this god as his patron and makes his vows and prayers to him, and another man chooses that god, according to the fancy or caprice of the worshipper. In the midst of a multitude of gods, as here supposed, a person would be situated almost as he is amongst his fellow-men; he owes a duty to this man, and a duty to that; there is every kind and degree of human duty, there is that of son to father and father to son, of husband to wife and wife to husband, of servant to master and master to servant; and besides all such definite duties, there is the universal duty of love and benevolence, which binds each member of the human family to all the rest; but there is no one person amongst men, of whom we can assert that we owe to him a duty or allegiance paramount to all other considera-

[1] Hugh Macmillan, *George Frederick Watts*, 194.

tions. God is but *one*, and because He is *one*, duty to Him is different from all other duties; and in reminding the Israelites of their duty towards God, Moses took in reality the deepest and most philosophical ground when he used these words, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is *one* Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

¶ The Sin of all Sins, or the Heresy of all Heresies, is a Worldly Spirit. We are apt to consider this Temper only as an Infirmity, or pardonable Failure; but it is indeed the great Apostasy from God and the Divine Life. It is not a Single Sin, but the whole Nature of all Sin. Every Sin, be it of what kind it will, is only a Branch of the worldly Spirit that lives in us. "There is but one that is good," saith our Lord, "and that is God." In the same Strictness of Expression it must be said, that there is but one Life that is good, and that is the Life of God and Heaven. Depart in the least Degree from the Goodness of God, and you depart into Evil; because nothing is good but His goodness.[1]

(2) *He is a support in time of trouble.*—What do we expect in a God? We expect that our God should be one who, in consequence of the relation of amity established between ourselves and Him, will be ready to stand up for us, to take hold of our hand, and lead us along the way of life, to support us in our trouble, animate us with hope in the dark passages of our experience, give us courage when foes are pressing on our heart, and comfort when the scalding tear is trickling down the cheek! Is not that what we would expect of a God? Do we not naturally look for something of this kind in a God? Can we believe in a God who is of no practical use, or help—who has no real sympathy with those who worship Him?

He doth give His joy to all:
He becomes an infant small,
He becomes a man of woe,
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not by:
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

[1] William Law.

Oh, He gives to us His joy,
That our grief He may destroy:
Till our grief is fled and gone
He doth sit by us and moan.[1]

(3) *He is an uplift to moral character.*—Again, what do we expect in a God? We expect that all the intercourse that we have with Him shall have a tendency to elevate our moral character. We expect that the more we know of Him, the more we shall become like His own glorious nature. We expect that there will be roused within us such an enthusiasm towards Him, that, drawn on as by an irresistible attraction, and following wherever He leads, enduring any hardship He may appoint, we shall wake up in His likeness, and gain that glorious ideal of moral perfectness, after which He has Himself bidden us to aspire. Is not that what we expect in a God? Can we expect less?

¶ Baal or Jehovah—it is often the choice between purity and sensuality. It was the sensual pollutions of Baal that awoke the most terrible denunciations of the Hebrew prophets, and sensuality is one of the first results of a life which has lost righteousness of thought. Do not mistake me. I do not say that impurity is the certain or inevitable result of loss of faith; but I do say that the man who loses righteousness of thought at least challenges the demon of sensuality to enter in and possess him. Shall I draw a modern sketch of what this aspect of Baalism means? It is a task I would thankfully evade, but it is a duty from which the minister of Christ dare not be recreant. It is a story with which every student of modern life is only too familiar, and it is written on a thousand broken hearts and miserable lives. Here is a youth reared in the ordered quiet of some country home, familiar with its domestic sanctities, its household affections and pieties. At length he leaves the home where the fragrance of prayer and love has sweetened daily life, and enters the great city; and then the spell of Baal begins to fall on him. He hears in the office, the warehouse, stories at which he blushes, but which he will soon learn eagerly to devour without blushing. The moral sensitiveness becomes deadened, and the influence of comradeship begins to tell. Through the ear-gate the enemy enters in, and soon the citadel is captured. One by one his small habitual pieties disappear; the Testament his mother gave him lies unused; the habit of prayer is dropped, for perhaps he shares a room with one who does not

[1] William Blake.

pray; and how difficult it is to pray then I know full well, for I have had to do it. In a few weeks the work is done; the boy's pure imagination is polluted, the boy's blood begins to riot with unholy impulses, and on the inward ear there falls more clearly and resistlessly every hour the delirious whispers and suggestions of impure seduction. He begins to think it manly to be cynical, and clever to talk of women in such a way that if his mother heard him she might wish that she had never borne him. And if the evil goes no further, can any say how great the havoc that is wrought?[1]

¶ You have heard the story of Frankenstein: how a great chemist strives to make a man, and builds the physical frame up bone by bone, and sinew by sinew, and at last finds some occult means whereby he breathes into him the spirit of life, and the monster moves and lives. He is its creator; and from that hour the thing which he has made haunts him, dogs him, will not let him rest, is a walking terror he cannot evade, a hideous presence from which he cannot flee. So he who raises the devil of impure delight raises a devil very difficult to lay. It enters in, and brings with it seven other devils worse than itself. It quenches conscience, it masters the will, it destroys too often intellectual pleasures, it robs the mind of peace, and visits the body with loathsome suffering, till of a man made in God's image it leaves something worse than a beast: and it makes the body, which should be the temple of the Holy Ghost, the mere agent and minister of infamous delights. Purity: it is embodied in an Elijah whose thoughts are full of God, whose

> Strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because his heart is pure.

Sensuality: it is embodied in a Jezebel who has given her name to all bad women, and an Ahab who forgets the duties of kingship in her guilty fascinations.[2]

(4) *He is a Redeemer from sin.*—With those who know the new relation in which the human family stands to its Creator through the redemption wrought for us by Jesus Christ, the argument for entire homage and obedience, which depends upon the fact of our being a redeemed people, is perhaps the strongest that can be brought. He who knows that God so loved him that He sent His Son into the world that men might live and not die,

[1] W. J. Dawson. [2] *Ibid.*

and who does not acknowledge that on this ground alone he is bound to consider himself as not his own but bought with a price, and under obligation to yield up all his powers to Him who redeemed him, cannot very easily be persuaded by any other argument, that he is bound to love and fear God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength.

ii. The Difficulty of the Decision.

What makes the decision difficult?

1. It does not seem so easy now as in some former times, to discern what is the good and what is the evil cause. For Homer's hero the one true omen, the one Divine direction, was to fight for the fatherland. To the Athenian, the cause of his city was the cause of his god; and it was not till the time of Socrates that the thought of some wider conflicting duty dawned upon him. And so for Deborah and Elijah, the God of Israel was the Lord of Hosts, and neither the one nor the other had the slightest hesitation in dooming the Syrian General, Sisera, or the priests of Baal, to death. One clear but narrow rule seemed to point out the path of right; and he who fell short of it, who "came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty," could not pretend that he was actuated by any motive but unwillingness to do his duty. And when Saul spared even the cattle of the Amalekites, and pled that he spared them to make a greater sacrifice to God, he met at once the stern reproof of the prophet Samuel: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

2. The general widening of our moral and intellectual horizon has made this simple way of opposing good and evil impossible to us. Christianity itself has taught us to sympathize with men of all classes and nations, to see the same humanity manifesting itself in them all; and this sympathy and insight will not let us regard our national foes as essentially the servants of an evil principle. We cannot echo the blessing pronounced by Deborah on the treacherous act of Jael, or regard the slaughter of Baal's priests as a just measure for the propagation of true religion. We have learned to recognize in all religions at least a partial expression of that reverence for a Divine Power which concentrates human life, and binds men together in families and nations.

Modern ideas of evolution have taught us to regard the great controversies and wars which have taken place in the past between different parties, different races, different religions, as rarely, if ever, a pure conflict between good and evil, but rather, in many cases, as issues in which important interests of humanity were maintained on both sides; so that it would have been a calamity if either side had been absolutely victorious over the other. And the more we discover this in regard to the past, the more we are led to ask ourselves whether it is not also the case with many of the issues most hotly contested in the present day. Such thoughts are, so to speak, in the air, and even those who are not directly conscious of them, are indirectly influenced by them, and are led to regard the exclusive spirit which sees good only in one cause or object, as bigoted and irrational.

3. But there is a dark side to all this: for just those wider views of things which produce tolerance are apt to produce also a sceptical spirit, which weakens the springs of manly energy. We are not able to split life in two with a hatchet as our fathers did, or to see all white on one side, and all black on the other; and therefore we are apt to lose the consciousness that there is a real battle between good and evil going on in the world, and find it hard to realize that we are called to take up arms on one side or the other. The complexity of life, the difficulty of seeing our way clearly, the constant discussion which tends to awaken doubt as to every course that can be taken, and the fact that good men are ranged on both sides in almost every controversy—all these things seem to offer excuses to the man who shrinks from the decisive choice that would make him the servant of any one cause or principle, and who prefers, in the old phrase, "to cultivate his garden," that is, to devote his main energies to looking after his own interests, and in other things to drift with the current that is strongest.

¶ When you find it difficult to come to a decision, said he, take a sheet of white paper and divide it into two columns. Write in one of these columns all the reasons you have for acting and in the other all the reasons you have for abstaining. As in algebra we cancel similar quantities, strike out the reasons that balance one another, and decide according to the reasons that remain.

This method is not suited to Serenus, and he never employs it. Serenus would exhaust all the papyrus and all the waxen tablets in the world, he would use up all the reeds of the Nile, and his steel stylus as well, before he would have exhausted the reasons that his subtle intellect would suggest to him, and, finally, he would not decide that any one of them was better or worse than the other.

Is it necessary then to act? Beyond question it is.[1]

¶ When once a decision is reached and execution is the order of the day, dismiss absolutely all responsibility and care about the outcome. Unclamp, in a word, your intellectual and practical machinery, and let it run free; and the service it will do you will be twice as good.[2]

> If I lay waste, and wither up with doubt
> The blessed fields of Heaven where once my faith
> Possessed itself serenely safe from death;
> If I deny the things past finding out;
> Or if I orphan my own soul of One
> That seemed a Father, and make void the place
> Within me where He dwelt in power and grace,
> What do I gain by that I have undone?[3]

4. There is, further, the moral difficulty of taking the unpopular side. The God of this world is custom, and has therefore the majority with him; the followers of the true God are a remnant. In every age there is a remnant, a holy seed, who defy the custom of the world, and cleave to God. It is the remnant, the ten righteous men, the aristocracy of virtue, who save a nation and redeem a time; and they do so in defiance of the many, who cheerfully go to their damnation and refuse to be saved. It is here, again, that this subject is so intensely modern, and teaches eternal truths. The priests of Baal are four hundred; they have spread their toils so carefully that the people do not want to be redeemed; the force of habit, the dignity of royal sanction, the spells of passion, all are with them; and when that great voice cries, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord," the people answer not a word. Is not this true still?

¶ Elijah was a man who felt keenly his solitariness in conflict. He felt this specially on Carmel: "I, even I only, am left a

[1] Anatole France, *On Life and Letters*, 12.
[2] William James.
[3] William Dean Howells.

prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men." Even in that terrible reaction which he experienced when under the juniper tree he emphasized the same conviction —a mistake, doubtless; but the mistake of a conscientious man who had already been made to realize keenly his loneliness in the conflict on Carmel. On this occasion we see how the man stands practically alone, for any voice that is lifted up in his defence; and few can realize how keenly he felt it. The men whom God raises up to stand alone are not men who do not feel it greatly. They are men of delicate touch; men who readily respond to sympathy, who feel acutely the sting of reproof. Elijah the prophet was one of these; a man who felt the burden of solitariness and the pain of having no human companion who shared his convictions and feelings.[1]

¶ Yet to do anything because others do it, and not because the thing is good, or kind, or honest in its own right, is to resign all moral control and captaincy upon yourself, and go post-haste to the devil with the greater number. The respectable are not led so much by any desire of applause as by a positive need for countenance. The weaker and the tamer the man, the more will he require this support; and any positive quality relieves him, by just so much, of this dependence.[2]

5. But there is also the last and most potent reason of all—moral indecision. There are those who plead honest doubt. But this is rarely sincere. An honest doubter is not contented until he has moved heaven and earth to resolve his doubt. It is related of Zaid, the sage of Mecca, who had broken with the national religion, that he stood with his back to the temple crying, "If I knew thee I would worship thee; but alas, I know thee not." Thus day after day he prostrated himself and moistened the ground with his tears. Next to wilful sin, indecision is the most pitiable state of man. To hang in doubt between time and eternity, the world and God, a sin and a crown of life, is, we may believe, if possible, more incensing to the Divine jealousy than open disobedience. It implies so much light and so much sense of what is good, that doubt has no plea of ignorance. The irresolution is not in the understanding or in the conscience, but in the will. The fault is in the heart. It convicts one of want of love, gratitude, and all high desires

[1] D. Davies.

[2] R. L. Stevenson, *Familiar Studies of Men and Books.*

after God; it reveals the stupor and earthliness which is still upon the soul. It proves the absence of faith; of a living consciousness of things unseen, and an active power of realizing what one believes, without which faith is dead. There is upon one a spiritual insensibility, a kind of moral apathy, a listless inattention to any thing which does not make itself felt by forcing its presence upon the senses of the body. And this at last deadens the perceptions of the soul.

¶ It always seems to me in reading this passage that it was not intellectual doubt that Elijah referred to, but rather a habit of moral indecision. I do not find any reason for concluding that these Israelites were in great intellectual doubt or difficulty with respect to the actual problem that lay before them. They could hardly have forgotten all the wonders God had wrought, for their national existence was a proof of His power. At that very moment there stood before them the man who was God's representative, and who exerted such miraculous power that he only bent the knee to Jehovah in prayer, and for three long dreary years the heavens had been shut. Standing there face to face with Elijah, the Israelites can hardly have entertained any very serious doubts as to whether "Baal" or "God" was really God. If you will look at the margin of your Bibles you will find the word "thoughts" suggested, instead of "opinions." "How long halt ye between two *thoughts*?" It is a more general word than "opinion." "Opinion" seems to lead us up into an intellectual region; "thought" in such a connection may be employed with a moral significance. It is not so much that they had really any intellectual difficulty, as to whether "Jehovah" or "Baal" was God, as that they were in a state of moral indecision as to which of the two they should recognize. This was in the prophet's mind at the moment when he expostulated with them.[1]

Warn't we gittin' on prime with our hot an' cold blowin',
Acondemnin' the war wilst we kep' it agoin'?
We'd assumed with gret skill a commandin' position,
On this side or thet, no one couldn't tell wich one,
So, wutever side wipped, we'd a chance at the plunder
An' could sue fer infringin' our paytented thunder;
We were ready to vote fer whoever wuz eligible,
Ef on all pints at issoo he'd stay unintelligible.
Wal, sposin' we hed to gulp down our perfessions,
We were ready to come out next mornin' with fresh ones;

[1] Canon Hay Aitken.

Besides, ef we did, 'twas our business alone,
Fer couldn't we du wut we would with our own?
An' ef a man can, wen pervisions hev riz so,
Eat up his own words, it's a marcy it is so.[1]

¶ To the strong and unhesitating spirit that sees the right on the one side as if it were written in letters of fire, and absolute wrong on the other, nothing is so incomprehensible as the lukewarm temper that will not be kindled either to love or to hatred, and seeks rather to avoid any decisive choice. So it was with the great poet Dante, who, in his *Divine Comedy*, describes for us a special region, outside of the Inferno of agony, a kind of Inferno of contempt, which is prepared for those who have lived "without blame, and without praise." There Dante places the angels who "neither were rebellious nor were faithful to God, but were only for themselves"; and also the shade of him who made the great renunciation, the Pope Celestine, who in his weak piety withdrew into a monastery, rather than face the task of contending with the evils of the world. "Forthwith," says the poet, "I understood and felt that this was the crew of caitiffs, hateful to God, and to God's enemies." "Mercy and justice alike disdain them; let us not speak of them, but look and pass them by." Dante's high strong spirit can comprehend energy and purpose, even when exerted in the cause of evil; he has keen sympathy even for some of those whom he regards as for great sins righteously doomed to everlasting punishment. What he cannot comprehend is the man who does not rise to a great opportunity, who hesitates between two opinions, who seeks to withdraw from the conflict, who shirks responsibility.[2]

¶ Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction—where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert—himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt—the Divine Reason. Huxley preached a humility content to learn from Nature. But the new sceptic is so humble that he doubts if he can even learn. Thus we should be wrong if we had said hastily that there is no humility typical of our time. The truth is that there is a real humility typical of our time; but it so happens that it is practically a more poisonous humility than the wildest prostrations of

[1] James Russell Lowell, *The Biglow Papers*, No. IV.
[2] Edward Caird.

the ascetic. The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping: not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on. For the old humility made a man doubtful about efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.[1]

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*.

A Still Small Voice.

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A Still Small Voice.

And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.—1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

1. This is, perhaps, the most forcible example of moral and spiritual teaching in a dramatic form in the whole range of Holy Scripture. And when it is regarded in the light of the mental condition of the prophet to whom it was granted, its force is still more evident. Elijah—the prophet of fire—a man of highly-strung emotional nature, a man who sometimes rose very high, but, like all such men, sometimes sank very low, had been marvellously elated by the great scene on Carmel. He imagined that by that one decisive stroke the idolatry of Baal had been completely overthrown, and that Jehovah would now reign supreme in the hearts of the people. His spirits had risen as high as the great mountain on which that memorable decision had been effected. But the excitement wore away, and he saw, as so many besides him have seen, that no great spiritual reformation is wrought by one stroke, however decisive. He saw, that the people still lusted after Baal, that the powers of the nation were still upon the side of idolatry, so that he seemed alone and solitary—the prophet of the Lord. Thus he fell from the clear and bracing air of the mountain to the enervating atmosphere of the valley below. The reaction which follows excitement came, and the prophet who, in solitary grandeur, could stand confident and fearless before the thousand priests of Baal, before the fierce oath of a vindictive woman fled to the desert, where his only wish was to die, because he was no better than his fathers. With nerves unstrung by excitement, with the

reaction producing despondency in his heart, with a sense of loneliness which made life seem a burden, and death a happy door of release, he plunged still farther into the desert, and came even to Horeb, the Mount of God.

2. Perhaps no spot on earth is more associated with the manifested presence of God than that sacred mount. There the bush burned with fire; there the Law was given; there Moses spent forty days and nights alone with God. It was a natural instinct that led the prophet thither, and all the world could not have furnished a more appropriate school. Natural scenery and holy associations lent all their powers to impress and elevate the soul.

We know the scenery. Beneath Elijah's eyes, as he stood at the entrance of the cave, lay the vast desert, a rough and stony plain, with dry and infrequent herbage. Infinite silence, infinite awe, as of the presence of an eternal God, encompassed him. Near at hand were the great mountain walls of red granite, deep-hewn valleys below splintered gorges; and above, the naked peaks piercing the heaven, in which the stars burned in depths even more vocal of infinitude than the desert. Tradition still points out, as tradition chose, the small and lonely valley, the upland level under the summit, where Elijah rested. One cypress tree stands now in its midst, and a well and tank are open near the ruined chapel which covers the rock in which the cave was set. It is one of the most silent places in the world, as hidden as it is silent. The granite cliffs lap it round on all sides but one, that side where Elijah stood, when, in the dawn, he came forth to hear the voice of God.

3. Elijah is in great despondency. It is amazing through what apparently inconsistent moods the same man can pass in a very short time. We go back but a little way to his experience upon Carmel, when the same Elijah moved about in majestic confidence, inspired by unclouded hope. He seemed to realize the immediateness of the Almighty, and he revelled in the fulness of his resources. And now all this bounding assurance passes away; the heavens appear to be emptied; the earth is deserted; and the prophet is languishing in this melancholy recital, "I, even I only, am left!" The once triumphant spokesman of the

Lord has temporarily lost his exuberant faith, and is sunk in dark despair.

There is something in human nature which makes us feel more akin to men who occasionally suffer defeat. If Elijah's pilgrimage along the way of life had been a series of unfailing triumphs, and if the cloud of uncertainty had never gathered about his heart, he might have seemed like a man of an alien race, having little or no kinship with the sons and daughters of despondency and grief. When the Apostle Peter is very bold, daring even death in the presence of the great ones of the earth, he appears very remote to the child of hesitancy and doubt; but in the hour of Peter's weakness, when he shrinks from the foes that beset him, he becomes one of the common crowd. His impulsiveness makes even his martyrdom human. St. Paul's feelings of wretchedness lend humanness even to his ecstasies, and his unspeakable revelations do not lie in lands too remote.

But, in spite of all this, the pity of the prophet's defeat! He knew the strength of his God, he had experienced the softened light of His guidance, he had had proofs innumerable of His providential care, he had "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and yet here he is, in a season of peculiar crisis, throwing up his ministry, and lying down with a desire to die!

4. What is the secret of his despondency? He has been counting heads. He has become the victim of the apparent. "They have thrown down thine altars, slain thy prophets!" The antagonisms are overwhelming! "I, even I only, am left!" The enemy, who flaunted his greatness, seemed the greatest power on the field.

Has there never been a time in our experience when we have grown baffled and weary with the greatness of our tasks and the smallness of our success with them? Have we never felt that we craved something besides the feeling that what we were doing was worth doing and that we would prevail in the end? Have we never had our hours of deep discouragement—yes, and our seasons of defeat—in which we questioned with ourselves whether what we were doing was worth doing after all? Like Elijah, perhaps, we played the man, and did it well. We confounded King Ahab in the full consciousness

of rectitude and sincerity of purpose. We even had our Mount Carmel, our dramatic stand for righteousness, and our hard-won, stormy triumph. We fixed our eye upon a certain goal and got there. We gained our point in some fiercely contested conflict of interests in which we managed to see justice done. We unmasked some piece of cruel humbug or put to silence some clamorous evil. We put our whole soul into the cause, whatever it was, which we felt to be ours, and our very intensity and self-forgetful zeal gained us a temporary victory. Then followed the hour of disillusionment. No sooner did we drive an evil out by one door than it returned by another. The victory we thought was going to do everything turned out to have done nothing; things were no better than they were before—worse, perhaps.

If things are so with us we are just in Elijah's position, and God's message to His prophet these hundreds of years ago is just as really His message to us to-day. Like Elijah we look too much to externals, dwell too much upon the circumference and too little at the centre of things. In proportion to our eagerness and self-devotion is our tendency to exaggerate our own importance to the cause of God and to waste time in looking for visible results of our activity. We have lost our true perspective by over-absorption in the immediate and the near outside the soul. We have, in fact, lost God. How shall we find Him again? The text tells us how God revealed Himself to Elijah.

I.

Where God is not.

"A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire."

i. God does not always reveal Himself in Nature.

The first point we would make is that God did not manifest Himself to Elijah *at this time* in the forces of Nature.

1. A fierce storm burst upon that wild spot, a fearful hurricane swept across the sky. As the black clouds of tempest rolled up from the sea, "a great and stroug wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord." The prophet stood amid all the horrors and wild disorder of a tropical storm. What could it mean? As the fierce tempest raged about the granite rocks and mountain peaks of that savage desert, and the massive fragments of stone were hurled down the heights to the plain below, and all nature seemed turbulent amid the rush and fury of the storm, how the heart of Elijah would burn with exultation to find his own wild spirit reflected in that tumultuous scene. The violent commotion and the passion of that whirlwind were a true image of himself. Could it be that God had mantled Himself in this form of terror? Was it indeed true that the vehemence of the Lord confirmed and crowned the vehemence of the man? Did the turbulence and passion of the human spirit find their counterpart in Him? The prophet's heart beat wildly at the very thought—O that God were such a one as he himself? "But the Lord was not in the wind." No! although it was a speaking symbol of the resistless power which he always delighted to associate with God, and had seen manifested in more than one memorable episode of his life.

"And after the wind an earthquake." The whole earth appeared convulsed as in terror. Solid mountains shook, and great rocks were split and sundered by the fierce upheaval. Deep chasms were opened where before had been nought but massive stone. "Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel." Once more the prophet saw an image of himself, saw his own convulsive nature mirrored in that scene of tumult and agitation. Would God reveal Himself now? Was it possible that God could be imaged in that wild disturbance? The prophet waited with anxious heart to know. He looked, and looked again, but saw not in the convulsion the presence of God. That was simply an image of himself. "But the Lord," he was again conscious, "was not in the earthquake," though it pictured vividly the tremendous upheaval by which he longed to cast down the altars of Baal and to destroy his priests, possible (he well knew) to the might of

Jehovah, who again and again had overwhelmed His enemies in Israel's past.

"And after the earthquake a fire." Suddenly that wilderness of granite peaks was lighted up with the blinding glare of tropic lightning. So swift and fierce were the streams of fire that flashed across the sky that the whole earth appeared bathed in glorious light, and the heavens one mass of flame. Was this the symbol of God's glory? The prophet felt perhaps that here was the reflection of his truest self. Surely at last God was about to make Himself known. But no. Once more it was borne in upon him that "the Lord was not in the fire," though to the stern eye of the prophet it was eloquent of the fierce vengeance which he had again and again in his despair invoked from heaven upon the sins of Jezebel and her godless court.

2. Does the writer of this story deny that, to those who had the prophetic gift of interpreting nature, there were special messages from heaven in the storm and the earthquake? By no means. At another time Jehovah might have spoken to Elijah, as He spoke to Job out of the tempest; but upon this occasion the prophet was to be shown that the highest revelations were to be expected, not in the extraordinary, but in the ordinary, not in the most awful, but in the gentlest and most familiar, manifestations of God in nature.

With kindlier mien, one said, "Go forth unto the fields,
For there, and in the woods, are balms that Nature freely yields;
Let Nature take thee to her heart! she hath a bounteous breast
That yearns o'er all her sorrowing sons, and she will give thee rest."

But Nature on the spirit-sick as on the spirit-free
Smiled, like a fair unloving face too bright for sympathy;
Sweet, ever sweet, are whispering leaves, are waters in their flow,
But never on them breathed a tone to comfort human woe!

Small solace for the deer that hath the arrow in its side,—
And only seeks the woods to die,—that o'er his dappled hide
Spread purple blooms of bedded heath, and ferny branchings tall—
A deadly hurt must have strong cure, or it hath none at all;

And the old warfare from within that had gone on so long,
The wasting of the inner strife, the sting of outward wrong,
Went with me o'er the breezy hill, went with me up the glade—
I found not God among the trees, and yet I was afraid!

I mused, and fire that smouldered long within my breast brake free,
I said, "O God, Thy works are good, and yet they are not Thee;
Still greater to the sense is that which breathes through every part,
Still sweeter to the heart than all is He who made the heart!

I will seek Thee, not Thine, O Lord! for (now I mind me) still
Thou sendest us for soothing not to fountain, nor to hill;
Yet is there comfort in the fields if we walk in them with Thee,
Who saidest, 'Come, ye burdened ones, ye weary, unto Me.'"[1]

3. God ignored the old means of manifestation because of the present needs of His prophet. Elijah had read into the Divine character the swift impatience of his own angry heart. He was not one of those who find it easy to live quietly. Born a Gileadite, he retained to the end much of the restlessness of the Bedouin. Headlong, impetuous, and swift to strike where it seemed that a blow was the shortest way to attain his purpose, he could confront a whole college of idolatrous priests and enjoy the combat. There is a kind of stern joy in the truculent irony of his taunts on Carmel which shows how much to his liking was the contest in which he was engaged. As the storm raged over Horeb his fierce nature would recognize a brother in the wild wind; the shocks of earthquake found an echo in the depths of his tumultuous spirit; the flashing lightning reflected the swift movements of his own fiery passions. He would be quick to see the hand of God in a national catastrophe; but not until it had been specially shown to him could he find the evidence of higher working when things had settled down into common channels. He would always choose the short cut to success, and he thought God must do so too. Like the Baptist in the dungeon of Machaerus, when the immediate developments that he expected

[1] Dora Greenwell.

did not follow, he found himself in anguish of soul, doubting whether he was not altogether mistaken, and for the time being he was crushed under a burden which he could not sustain. Men of this type make splendid reformers, and they are the born pioneers of any new movement for God and righteousness. But they are generally too summary in their verdicts to be good judges of the Divine dealings with men as a whole. Sooner or later they fall into the mistake that things are not moving fast enough.

¶ Savonarola, whose burning utterances from the pulpit of the Duomo flashed like the sword of God of which he spoke into the guilty heart of fifteenth-century Florence, went far beyond the guidance of the Spirit within him, when he assumed to know that only through a storm of vengeance would the Church be purged of its abuses, and the clergy be restored from licentiousness and formalism to the spirituality which he felt was their supreme need. The needed renewal came to Europe; but it came rather through the spiritual awakening of the Reformation than through any vast temporal judgments upon the Papacy, and the brave monk died in no small measure a martyr to his own mistakes. The tempestuous spirit of Luther needed to be balanced by the saner and more sympathetic insight of Melanchthon. In the work of the Apostles the strenuous energy of St. Peter had to be tempered by the spirituality of St. John.[1]

ii. God does not reveal Himself in Nature finally.

The second point we would make is that God does not manifest Himself to us *finally or in His fulness* in Nature, or in the forces which in our text are mirrored by Nature.

The world cannot be exhausted by physical explanations: and so the savage who worships the forces of nature, and the scientist who declares them to be the ultimate source of all things, are equally and very similarly in the wrong. God is not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. These are only the fringe of His garment, the shadow of His inner glory. God is a Spirit, and is known through the vocal silence of spiritual fellowship.

How often in the midst of the sublimities of nature, a spectator, gazing upon some high mountain-range, has been fain to cry out, "What an aid to devotion! what a ladder up to Heaven!" Who has not exclaimed, when the thunder-cloud has

[1] F. B. Macnutt.

rolled its awful peal, "Surely this is the voice of God!" And yet it is to be questioned whether any man was ever drawn to God by the contemplation of the glory of creation alone: or, whether any man ever received, indeed, his call to grace, in the summons of the storm. Men have lived their threescore years and ten in all the intimacy of nature's most eloquent works, and from the cradle to the grave, they have not found God, for He is not in the wind; and He is not in the earthquake; and He is not in the fire; but He is in the still small voice.

1. "The Lord was not in the wind." Strong religious impulse may be more than half physical,—a matter of temperament, of constitution. Earthly passion, in some natures, may take this form; the language, the intended and professed objects, may be of heaven, and the spirit of earth. Even though mountains of opposition are rent by it, and rocks of prejudice are broken in pieces, and changes are brought about which fill the thoughts of men and live in history, it may yet be that the agency which effects all this is itself destitute of anything properly Divine; "the Lord was not in the wind."

2. "The Lord was not in the earthquake." Spasmodic terror may be only terror. The thought, or sight, or immediate apprehension of death, may convulse, to its very depths, the human soul. But mere agitation may be only desperate; "the fear of the Lord," as distinct from the fear of anything else, "is the beginning of wisdom." Whether the Lord is or is not in the great earthquakes of the soul depends, generally speaking, upon the soul's previous relations with Him.

3. "The Lord was not in the fire." He was in the burning bush; He was in the fiery tongues of Pentecost; but He was not in the fire which played around Elijah on Horeb. Religious passion carried to the highest pitch of enthusiasm is a great agency in human life; but it may be too inconsiderate, too truculent, too entirely lacking in tenderness and charity, to be in any sense Divine. Christendom has been the scene of the most Divine enthusiasm of which the soul of man has ever had experience; but it has also been ablaze with fires (and they are not

altogether extinct in our day and country) of which it may certainly be said that the Lord is not in them.

¶ In our religious experience we are too apt to rely upon carnal force and energy. We are hopeful if we can make a noise, and create excitement, stir, and agitation. The heaving of the masses under newly invented excitements we are too apt to identify with the power of God. "At least we must have an eloquent preacher," we say,—"one who can plead with choice picked words, a master of the art of oratory." Yet God does not always choose this form of power, for still He will not have our faith to stand in the wisdom of words, but He will have us to learn this lesson, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Crash after crash the orator's passages succeed each other. What a tremendous passage! The hearers must surely be impressed. Wind! And the Lord is not in it. And now everything seems to shake, while, like a second John the Baptist, the minister proclaims woe and terror, and pronounces the curse of God upon a generation of vipers! Will not this break hard hearts? No. Nothing is accomplished. It is an earthquake; but the Lord is not in the earthquake. Another form of force remains. Here comes one who pleads with vehemence; all on fire, he flashes and flames. Look at the coruscations of his sensational metaphors and anecdotes. Yes, fire (might we not say fireworks?); and yet the Lord does not work by such fire. The Lord is not in the fire. The furious energy of unbridled fanaticism the Lord does not use. God is not there. The hallowed mind—the prayerful frame—the Spirit—they are all absent there. There was the wind, but "the Lord was not in the wind"; there was the earthquake, but "the Lord was not in the earthquake"; there was the fire, but "the Lord was not in the fire." "The still small voice" did not speak. Souls go away admiring—excited—agitated; but there has been no intercourse with God.

¶ Some great and overwhelming catastrophe has occurred, some judgment has broken over our heads, the sudden stroke of death has made its awful appeal; and one with whom we have long been familiar has been hurried, in a moment, to his grave; and the wisdom of man begins to argue—"Surely, now, there will be a revival. The Lord will be recognized here. Surely, in so loud a sign, hearts that never prayed before, will hear their Maker's bidding, and will lift up to Him a repentant cry." While we look for it, the solemn event passes by, and it is all forgotten. "The still small voice" has not been heard. The wind and the

earthquake and the fire have been only like a pageant when it is past.

iii. Nature is often a Preparation for the Voice of God.

The Lord was not *in* the hurricane; the Lord was not *in* the earthquake, the Lord was not *in* the fire: but the wind, the earthquake, the fire went before the Lord. And so our third point is that *the wind, the earthquake, and the fire may be a preparation for the still small voice.*

1. It very often pleases God to make use of external displays of His power to make way for the working of His grace; only, we say, He is jealous to show that these external circumstances are never themselves the grace. Let us not despise them. The most earnest sermon that was ever preached, cannot convert; but, if God pleases, it can awaken the slumbering feelings in a man's heart. The grandeur of the most awful scenery can never declare the Gospel to the beholder; but it may humble him into a deep sense of his own insignificance. We would not underrate the wild prelude that ushers in the harmony. God delights to write out His love in the background of His terrors.

2. We see this clearly in the case of Israel at this time. Before Elijah left the land of Israel manifestations of God's power had been given fitted to awe the minds of men, but these were the mere forerunners of His kingdom of grace, and of its great power—the word of life; and because they had not done what the word of God alone can do, Elijah fled. Elijah, to whom the word of the Lord was committed, fled, instead of carrying that word forth among the people.

And not only had he overlooked the power of God's word, but he had overlooked also the favourable circumstances which had occurred for its going forth in might. The Lord is not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the devouring fire; yet these may and do prepare the way for His still small voice. These awe men's minds and make them attentive to the voice of God. It was thus God had roused the attention of Israel in that very wilderness to which Elijah had fled. He first impressed the minds of the people with a deep sense of His majesty, and then He spake to them. He made the earth to tremble, and the

mountain to quake, and the thunder to roll, and then He spake to the awestruck tribes the words of His law. It was thus He had dealt with His servant Job. Provoked by the miserable comforters who had gathered round him, Job had spoken unadvisedly with his lips, and had been ready to justify himself, when suddenly the sky darkened and the lightnings began to flash from cloud to cloud, and the tempest came sweeping around them; and out of the whirlwind God called to Job and spake to him, and reproved him for darkening counsel by words without knowledge; and "Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." Thus humbled he waited for the voice of God, the still small voice. It came, and he was enlightened and comforted. It was thus God dealt with Isaiah. He saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"; and then he heard the voice of the Lord, the still small voice, and gave ear to it. It was thus the Lord dealt with Saul of Tarsus. On his way to Damascus he was overwhelmed by the glory which shone around him, and fell to the earth, and then a voice spake to him—the still small voice of the Lord of glory. All these had a manifestation of the power and majesty of the Lord preparatory to the coming of the still small voice; and when their minds were awed and they were attentive to hear, the word of the Lord came.

Now, before Elijah fled from the land of Israel, God had been rousing the nation and impressing their minds. The prophets of Baal had been confounded and then cut off; the land had been afflicted, grievously afflicted, and then delivered; and surely the minds of many must have been opened to conviction; but the means of conviction did not come to them, for the prophet fled. The still small voice came not.

3. We know it in our own experience. There are times when we need, as Elijah needed, the rebuke of the storm, the terror of the earthquake, the purification of the fire, that, by having implanted within us the hardy virtues that outbrave the tempest, we may be fitted for the still small voice of God. Robertson puts it thus: "The storm struggle must precede the still small voice. There are hearts which must be broken with disappointment

before they can rise into hope. Blessed is the man who, when the tempest has spent its fury, recognizes his Father's voice in its undertone, and bares his head and bows his knee, as Elijah did." To such spirits it seems as if God had said, In the still sunshine and ordinary ways of life you cannot meet Me; but, like Job in the desolation of the tempest, you shall see My form and hear My voice, and know that your Redeemer liveth.

'Tis not the whirlwind, o'er our fair fields sweeping
That speaks God's present wrath:
This is but nature's course, for all men keeping
One indiscriminate path.

Nor yet the earthquake, firm foundations shaking
Of houses long since built:
This is but fortune's chance, its havoc making,
Without affixing guilt.

Nor yet the fire, whate'er is near confounding
In blind remorseless flame:
This is but man's fierce ire, which all surrounding
Treats, good or bad, the same.

It is the still small voice within which speaketh,
When guilt's fierce gust is done,
That tells the doom God's righteous anger wreaketh,
Yet tells, that we may shun.

O gentle Lord, who like a friend reprovest,
Tender not less than true;
Thou our hard hearts by whispered warnings movest,
Their erring ways to rue.

Thou, whose pure eye like lightning might consume him,
On man with pity look'st;
Thou who to fire, storm, earthquake, well might'st doom him,
With still small voice rebuk'st.[1]

II.

WHERE GOD IS.

"And after the fire a still small voice."

The terrible vision of the storm has passed. The blast of the tempest is stilled. To the convulsions of the earthquake succeeds

[1] Lord Kinloch.

the calm, to the terrifying glare of the lightning the pure and fresh brightness of day. Heaven reappears—the heaven of the East, with its transparent and deep azure; nature seems born again more beautiful and serene, and from the valleys there rises to the top of Horeb, and the cave where Elijah had sheltered himself, a sweet and gentle sound—the harmonious voice of nature opened up afresh under the breath of God. Elijah goes forth from his retreat. An inexpressible emotion seizes his soul, which the terror had thrown into confusion; an ineffable feeling of peace, of freshness, and of joy penetrates it. Neither the voice of the tempest nor the convulsions of nature had roused him to that point. In that sweet and gentle sound he recognizes the presence of God, and, covering his head with his mantle, he bows himself and adores.

¶ Elijah had shared in the outward manifestations of Divine favour which appear to mark the Old Dispensation—the fire on Carmel, the storm from the Mediterranean, the avenging sword on the banks of the Kishon. These signs had failed; and he was now told that in these signs, in the highest sense, God was not; not in these, but in the still small gentle whisper of conscience and solitude was the surest token that God was near to him. Not in his own mission, grand and gigantic as it was, would after-ages so clearly discern the Divine inspiration, as in the still small voice of justice and truth that breathed through the writings of the later Prophets, for whom he only prepared the way—Hosea, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah. Not in the vengeance which through Hazael and Jehu was to sweep away the house of Omri, so much as in the discerning Love which was to spare the seven thousand; not in the strong east wind that parted the Red Sea, or the fire that swept the top of Sinai, or the earthquake that shook down the walls of Jericho, would God be brought so near to man, as in the still small voice of the child of Bethlehem, as in the ministrations of Him whose cry was not heard in the streets, in the awful stillness of the Cross, in the never-failing order of Providence, in the silent insensible influence of the good deeds and good words of God and of man. Elijah, the furthest removed of all the prophets from the evangelical spirit and character, has yet enshrined in the heart of his story the most forcible of protests against the hardness of Judaism, the noblest anticipation of the breadth and depth of Christianity.[1]

¶ However the rendering may be altered—into "a gentle

[1] A. P. Stanley.

murmuring sound" or, as in the R.V. margin, "a sound of gentle stillness"—no expression is more full of the awe and mystery of the original than the phrase "a still small voice." It was God's whisper to Elijah's soul. Was it articulate or not? Was it accompanied by an outward rustling, as Cheyne thinks? We do not know. All that is of consequence is that in it Elijah recognized the presence of God and came forth to worship.

Why seek ye for Jehovah
'Mid Sinai's awful smoke?
The burning bush now shelters
A sparrow's humble folk;
The curve of God's sweet heaven
Is the curve of the leaf of oak;
The Voice that stilled the tempest
To the little children spoke,—
The bread of life eternal
Is the bread He blessed and broke.

"A still small voice." That was how God manifested Himself to Elijah and how He delights to manifest Himself to us. Looking at the words more closely we see—

i. That God is most really in the gentlest things—in that which is *still.*

ii. That God is not in the agencies that seem the mightiest—He prefers to manifest Himself in that which is *small.*

iii. That God manifests Himself as a *Voice.*

i. Stillness.

It is difficult to realize that in the hush which followed the fire, the earthquake, the wind, God really was. But if there is any meaning in this story, it is that the silence was more really Divine than the noise, the flash, and the trembling which went before. And one of the hardest lessons we have to learn is that God is in the quiet, the gentle influences which are ever around us, working upon us as the atmosphere does, without any visible or audible token of its presence. We must seek to discern God in the quiet and the gentle. It is perhaps because we fail to discern Him there that He comes sometimes in the tempest. We do not find Him in health, and so He comes in sickness. We do not find Him in prosperity, and so He comes in adversity. We

do not find Him in the stillness, and so He is compelled to come in the storm. But He would rather take the gentle way.

> Are there not, then, two musics unto men?—
> One loud and bold and coarse,
> And overpowering still perforce
> All tone and tune beside;
> Yet in despite its pride
> Only of fumes of foolish fancy bred,
> And sounding solely in the sounding head;
> The other soft and low,
> Stealing whence we do not know,
> Painfully heard, and easily forgot,
> With pauses oft and many a silence strange
> (And silent oft it seems, when silent it is not),
> Revivals too of unexpected change:
> Haply thou think'st 'twill never be begun,
> Or that 't has come, and been, and past away:
> Yet turn to other none,—
> Turn not, oh, turn not thou!
> But listen, listen, listen,—if haply be heard it may;
> Listen, listen, listen,—is it not sounding now?[1]

1. *In quietness there is power.*—This is a truth which in these days we are very apt to forget. We have fallen upon a generation of fuss, and bustle, and trumpet-blowing, and advertising. It would almost seem as if many of us believed that we were to take the world by storm. We get up excitements in mass-meetings, and pass resolutions, and listen to eloquent orators, and make thundering plaudits, as if these alone were to win the day. We have more faith in the whirlwind and the earthquake than in the still small voice; and we mistake a momentary out-flashing of enthusiasm for the celebration of a final triumph. The sensational is everywhere in the ascendant. We see it in the extravagance of dress that seeks to call attention to itself; we see it in the domain of literature, in the highly coloured and hotly seasoned romances; we see it in feverish speculations. Surely there is something in this vision for our sensation-loving life. It were well that we had less faith in noise, and more in that which is the most God-like thing on earth, namely, a character moulded after the example of Christ, and created and

[1] Clough.

sustained by the agency of the Holy Ghost. It were well that the voices among us were less loud, and the deeds were more pronounced. Life is more potent than words; and character, though quiet, is more influential in the long-run than any immediate sensation that flares up and crackles like a blaze of thorns.

¶ God's greatest works are carried on in silence. All noiselessly the planets move in their orbits; "there is no speech nor language; their voice cannot be heard" as they sweep on through their appointed paths in space. No sound attends the crystallization of the dewdrops on the myriad blades of grass in the summer evenings; and while the crops are growing in the fields, so profound sometimes is the stillness that all nature seems asleep. What greater revolution can there be than that which recurs at every morning's dawn when night quits her "ebon throne" and resigns her empire to the king of day? Yet how quietly it is accomplished! There is first a streak of light along the edge of the eastern horizon, so faint that you wonder whether it has not shot out from that brilliant star; then a few stray gleams of glory, as if the northern aurora had flitted to another quarter of the heavens; then a flush of ruddy beauty before which the stars begin to pale; and as we watch how one by one these faithful sentinels put out their lamps, the sun himself appears, and becomes the undisputed monarch of the heavens. But it is all so silent that the sleeper is not awakened on his couch, and the pale, sick one who has been longing for the morning knows not it is there until through the shadowed casement it looks in upon him with its benignant smile.[1]

¶ I look upon my study walls and see Munkacsy's great picture, "Christ before Pilate." There is a vast, howling mob, the very incarnation of brutal and irresistible force. It seems as though the violent crowd can carry all before it. Standing before the surging, shouting throng is the meek figure of the Master! It seems as though one hand out of the violent mob could crush Him like a moth! And yet we now know that in that silent figure there dwelt the secret of Almightiness, and the Lord was not in the mob.[2]

¶ The quietest room in a Lancashire cotton mill is the engine-room. It is significantly called "the power-room" of the mill. But from that quietest room emerges all the force which speeds the busy looms in their process of production. Let the engine be neglected, let countless looms be added without proportional

[1] W. M. Taylor. [2] J. H. Jowett.

increase of power, and the mill breaks down. We have been neglecting our quietest room, our power-room; we have been adding to the strain without multiplying the force, and the effects are seen in weariness, joylessness, and ineffectiveness. We must not work less, but we must pray more. We cannot minimize our activities; but we must sustain them with those more adequate supplies of grace that come in answer to common prayer.[1]

2. *In the quietest force—love—there is most power.*—You have heard of the old fable which tells how the sun and the wind strove with each other, which of them should first make the traveller divest himself of his cloak. The more fiercely the wind blew, the more firmly the wayfaring man gathered his outer garment about him. But when the sun shone warmly upon him he speedily threw the weighty covering from his shoulders. So antagonism creates antagonism. If you attempt to drag me by force, it is in my nature to resist you, and I will pull against you with all my might; but if you try to attract me by kindness, it is equally in my nature to yield to its influence, and I will follow you of my own free will. What the hammer will not weld together without fiery heat and prolonged labour, the magnet will bring together and hold together in a moment. So in dealing with men, the mightiest influence is love.

¶ I was a lad of fifteen years at the time, an unindentured apprentice on board a large sailing ship which was homeward bound with a cargo of grain from Tacoma, Puget Sound. Not far south of San Francisco we encountered a violent storm which continued without abatement for nearly forty-eight hours. The severe buffeting to which the ship was subjected by the great seas caused the cargo to shift, and the vessel lay with her starboard rail completely submerged. To make matters worse, a spare spar had burst from its fastenings, and to the roar of the elements was added at frequent intervals the thud, thud, of this spar as the sea dashed it like a battering ram against the deck. Our situation was one of extreme peril, and little hope was entertained by captain or crew that the vessel would weather the storm.

In the midst of the storm I felt the awe which the play of destructive forces can inspire. As I considered our danger, these same forces stirred my heart with fear. Loud and terrible, however, as were the voices which spoke to me, their message did not go deep enough to abide. The impression made on me by this

[1] Charles A. Berry, *Life*, 266.

dread experience, though it seemed at the time to be very great, proved to be altogether transient. In a comparatively few hours the storm was by God's mercy stilled, and the ship steered a course for San Francisco. The sense of danger then began to yield to a feeling of security, and my own conduct, as that of the crew generally, was characterized by levity itself. Before the anchor was cast in the beautiful harbour of San Francisco, the storm and danger were only a memory. The solemn experience had left no other sign.

Very different in its effect was the experience of my first hours at home, where I arrived about seven months later. I had deserted my vessel in Frisco, and my relatives did not know where I was or how I had been conducting myself. When I stood before them empty-handed, their fears that all had not been right were quickened; yet only words of welcome were spoken. Their looks, however, and their voices, had something in them that appealed powerfully to all that was best in me. Their entire attitude had the permanently arresting quality of the "still, small voice." It was love patiently and, as far as possible, cheerfully shouldering the burden of my folly. That experience is more than a memory. The impression it made was deep and abiding. It has long been my conviction that that was the turning-point in my spiritual history. Then was begun in me a work of whose significance I was at the time unconscious; a work which is largely the cause of my being a Christian minister to-day; a work which, by God's grace, shall not stop, even for death.[1]

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity
Interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of Thy call,
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall,
As fell Thy manna down.

[1] John M'Neil (Airdrie).

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
  Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
  The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
  Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
  O still, small voice of calm![1]

ii. Smallness.

The significance of the symbolism portrayed before the despondent prophet was surely that, while comparative impotence may roar in the guise of tempest and fire, Almightiness may move in whispers. Feebleness hides in the apparently overwhelming; Almightiness hides in apparent impotence. God was in the weak thing! Elijah left the mount with his conceptions entirely changed.

1. And so we see that we must look for God in the everyday occurrences. We should all like to be spoken to by a prodigy. But the Lord does not often do that. He is too great to do that. It belongs to everything that is really great to act simply. The infinite God does all His works in the simplest manner possible. And the Lord does everything in a way to show His own power. If the machinery were great, the mover might be little.

¶ There is in many minds something which makes them crave for proofs of the presence and power of God in remarkable interruptions of nature and providence rather than in their orderly course. It is a perversion of the truth. If a miracle is sublime, how much more sublime is the unity and greatness of the order which it seems, on some singular occasion, to interrupt. The mind which has learned to see God in the daily course of nature and providence comes nearer to the happy truth than that to which this order is meaningless, and which cries out to Him to raise up His power and come and declare His presence by miraculous wonders. Is it not better for us to learn that God is near in the daily exhibitions of His goodness than to look for Him only in those rare events in which we try to persuade

[1] J. G. Whittier.

ourselves that He has worked a miracle in answer to our cry? For one miraculous we enjoy a thousand customary gifts of grace and kindness. Happy are we if in our deep hearts we consent that this is so, and that this is best.[1]

2. We must not undervalue agencies because they seem to be insignificant. It was said of the Lord Himself, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" and the first apostles were despised as "unlearned and ignorant men." Yet though God used only "the weak things of the world," He did confound with them "the things which are mighty." The big trees in California have sprung from seeds each of which is no larger than a grain of wheat; and the river which at its source is a tiny tinkling rill over which a child may stride, is at its mouth broad enough and deep enough to bear a navy on its bosom.

¶ It used to be thought that the upheaval of the continents and the rearing of the great mountains was due to cataclysms and conflagrations and vast explosions of volcanic force. It has long been known that they are due, on the contrary, to the inconceivably slow modifications produced by the most insignificant causes. It is the age-long accumulation of mica-flakes that has built up the mighty bastions of the Alps. It is the toil of the ephemeral coral insect that has reared whole leagues of the American Continent and filled the Pacific Ocean with those unnumbered isles

> Which, like to rich and various gems, inlay
> The unadorned bosom of the deep.

It is the slow silting up of the rivers that has created vast deltas for the home of man. It has required the calcareous deposit of millions of animalculæ to produce even one inch of the white cliffs along the shores.[2]

¶ Some time ago I was in Stirling Castle, and the guide pointed out to me the field of Bannockburn, and revelled in his description of the bloody fray. I turned from the contemplation of material strife and I saw John Knox's pulpit! I allowed the two symbols to confront each other, and they enshrined for me the teaching given to Elijah in the days of old. The ghostly power suggested by the pulpit was of infinitely greater import than the carnal power suggested by the battlefield. I remember one day passing along the road, by the far-stretching works of Messrs. Armstrong, that vast manufactory of destructive arma-

[1] G. R. Wynne. [2] F. W. Farrar.

ments. I was almost awed by the massiveness of the equipment and by the terrific issues of their work. Near by I saw a little Methodist Chapel; it could have been put in a small corner of Armstrong's works, but it became to me the symbol of the enduring and the eternal. The ghostly breathing was in the plain little edifice, and the creations of its ministries will be found when the bristling armaments have crumbled into dust.[1]

III.

A Voice.

All through the ages God has manifested Himself as a Voice, as the voice of conscience in the hearts of men. He has left no man utterly without guidance. Often, however, the voice is almost silent, because dulled by its faulty medium, man. But to-day we are not dependent on the voice of conscience alone.

1. There is *the voice of the human Jesus.* Was not Jesus God's "still small voice" when in His human garb He walked the plains of Galilee, and declared His Father's glory and His Father's will? The bruised reed He never broke; the smoking flax He never quenched. He did not strive, nor cry, nor lift up His voice in the street. Despised in His littleness, that "voice" was, nevertheless, the great power of Jehovah; and, calm as were those loving lips, they uttered the mandates that all worlds obeyed. Evil spirits cowered at His presence; sickness, and sorrow, and death fled before Him. Against the dark background of the penal law, He declared the Gospel's peace. And when, on the Mount of Beatitudes, that "voice," long silent, began, in its own gentleness, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Sinai's trumpet grew silent! And when He stood, and called so lovingly, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—who remembered, then, any more, the blackness, and the darkness, and the tempest? And when, at last, His dying lips spoke those words of Godhead, "It is finished," did not every adoring angel, as he stooped to the sound, confess that all the displays that had been made of God, in His own universe, were in magnificence as nought to that one "still small voice" of Calvary?

[1] J. H. Jowett.

¶ If we ask what gives us assurance of the truth and justice of God, the answer is, the life and death of Christ, who is the Son of God, and the Revelation of God. We know what He Himself has told us of God, and we cannot conceive perfect goodness separate from perfect truth; nay, this goodness itself is the only conception we can form of God, if we confess what the mere immensity of the material world tends to suggest—that the Almighty is not a natural or even a supernatural power, but a Being of whom the reason and conscience of man have a truer conception than imagination in its highest flights. He is not in the storm, nor in the thunder, nor in the earthquake, but "in the still small voice." And this image of God as He reveals Himself in the heart of man is "Christ in us, the hope of glory"; Christ as He once was upon earth in His sufferings rather than His miracles—the image of goodness and truth and peace and love.[1]

2. There is *the voice of the risen Lord.*

(1) This voice *draws.* Other religions have books: Muhammadanism has a book, and a grand old book it is, called the Koran. Some of its stories are almost equal in beauty to the stories of the Book of Genesis. But Muhammadanism has no voice. Muhammad is dead, and his voice is silent in the tomb. Hinduism has books, and interesting books they are, called the Veda and Shaster. They are full of hymns and precepts. Some of them are almost equal in purity and spirituality to some of the Old Testament Psalms and Proverbs. But Hinduism has no voice. The great prophets of Hinduism who thought out the books are dead, and their voices are heard no more. Christianity also has a book. It is more beautiful than the Veda or Shaster. But the book of Christianity is also a voice. The Prophet of Christianity is not dead. Christ is alive, and fills all the words of the Bible with a living voice. He speaks again, through His Spirit, the very words which He spoke when on earth. Herein is the great difference between the Bible and every other book. Other books contain the thoughts of their authors at a particular period in their life, but they may have changed their opinions after writing them, or they may have died. Their voices cannot speak the very words they have written. We read Shakespeare and Milton, but we do not hear them. We hear Christ; His opinions are un-

[1] B. Jowett.

changeable, and He is ever living. He speaks the sweet words of mercy to every generation.

¶ When I have seen an idol arrayed in traditionary terrors, and magnificently paraded through the streets of a large native town, and in the night too; and when ten thousand human beings have pressed near to worship amid the gleaming of innumerable torches of coloured light, and rockets and candles of every device shooting up into the air; and when the priests have sung in solemn cadence, and the multitudes have shouted their acclamations, I have caught the prevailing awe. With all my better knowledge I could not resist the terror and beauty of the spectacle. But the Lord was not there. The multitudes returned to their homes with an intoxicated sense and a fevered imagination; yet with no silent voice to instruct and win them to God. But I have taken one of those Hindus whom the wind and the earthquake and the fire had dazzled, but not changed; I have drawn him away from the three signs and invited him to wait with me for the fourth; and while we listened, a still small voice spoke in our hearts; and when he heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and cried, "What must I do to be saved?" And the effect of that voice was a new heart and a new life. It was the silent winning of Calvary, and not the fiery testimony of Carmel: it was not Moses or Elijah thundering forth the Law upon the senses, but Jesus breathing truth and grace into the soul.[1]

(2) It is a voice which *guides*. There was and still is in the soul of every man who has not by long-continued sin succeeded in stifling it that which the early Friends called the "Light Within," or the "Divine Seed"; that which we in our generation, by a mode of expression which comes more naturally to us, call the Voice of the Lord speaking to the soul of man. "Do you mean the conscience?" is a question which is often asked when we plead for the continued existence of this Divine gift. Yes, the conscience, which has certainly had a mighty part to play in the drama of the re-making of man; but also something much more than the conscience; the existence in man of a hearing ear, which has often enabled him to distinguish which of two modes of action, neither in itself wrong, it is his Lord's will that he should choose; in short, that which our forefathers so often spoke of as "the perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit."[2]

[1] E. E. Jenkins.

[2] T. Hodgkin, *Human Progress and the Inward Light*, 28.

I hear it often in the dark,
  I hear it in the light,—
Where is the voice that comes to me
  With such a quiet might?
It seems but echo to my thought,
  And yet beyond the stars!
It seems a heart-beat in a hush,
  And yet the planet jars!

Oh, may it be that far within
  My inmost soul there lies
A spirit-sky, that opens with
  Those voices of surprise.
Thy heaven is mine—my very soul!
  Thy words are sweet and strong;
They fill my inward silences
  With music and with song.

They send me challenges to right,
  And loud rebuke my ill;
They ring my bells of victory;
  They breathe my "Peace, be still!"
They ever seem to say: "My child,
  Why seek me so all day?
Now journey inward to thyself,
  And listen by the way."[1]

¶ That individual and immediate guidance, in which we recognize that "the finger of God is come unto us" seems to come in, as it were, to complete and perfect the work rough-hewn by morality and conscience. We may liken the laws of our country to the cliffs of our island, over which we rarely feel ourselves in any danger of falling; the moral standard of our social circle to the beaten highway road which we can hardly miss. Our own conscience would then be represented by a fence, by which some parts of the country are enclosed for each one, the road itself at times being barred or narrowed. And that Divine guidance of which I am speaking could be typified only by the pressure of a hand upon ours, leading us gently to step to the right or the left, in a manner intended for and understood by ourselves alone.[2]

¶ When we have crossed to the other side of the gulf that separates the seen from the unseen we shall find that nothing has

[1] W. C. Gannett. [2] Caroline Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds.*

ever mattered except faithfulness to that voice. Place does not matter—one might gain all the glory of the world and yet be a stranger to one's own soul; fame and station count for nothing in that mysterious beyond towards which we are all hastening; the only possession we can carry there is what we are. Can we not live now as though our hearts were set only upon eternal values? Can we not do with our lives now what we would do if we knew for certain that nothing shall live but love? Can we not gaze calmly at the destructive effect of earthquake, wind, and fire, when we know that the still, small voice is whispering, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? Above all, we shall not be tempted to think that success or failure depends in the least upon what the world can see.[1]

Loud mockers in the roaring street
  Say Christ is crucified again:
Twice pierced His gospel-bearing feet,
  Twice broken His great heart in vain.
    I hear, and to myself I smile,
    For Christ talks with me all the while.

No more unto the stubborn heart
  With gentle knocking shall He plead,
No more the mystic pity start,
  For Christ twice dead is dead indeed.
    So in the street I hear men say,
    Yet Christ is with me all the day.

[1] R. J. Campbell.

Naaman.

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NAAMAN.

And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?—2 Kings v. 13.

1. THE history of Naaman, though it fills only one chapter of the Bible, has much that makes it peculiarly attractive. He possessed nearly every requisite to worldly success and the full gratification of the highest ambition. He had the genius of a great commander; under his leadership the armies of Syria had won great victories. Besides this gift of leadership, he had the personal courage and the heroic daring of a popular hero admired and extolled as "a mighty man of valour." Because of his great services to the State he enjoyed to an unusual degree the favour and confidence of his king, who lavished upon him the rich gifts and great offices which monarchs confer upon their favourites.

¶ Tradition says that it was Naaman whose hand shot the arrow that smote between the joints of Ahab's armour, so that he fell down dead in his chariot. Such a man as sometimes comes to the front in the desperate needs of a nation—daring, wise, splendid in heroism, seeing the thing to be done and doing it swiftly and well: his name an inspiration to his forces, and a terror to his foes—how much can such a one do, carrying in his hands the destinies of nations. Here is greatness: great in himself, great in his position, great in his possessions, great in his achievements, great in his authority: no element of greatness is lacking.[1]

2. But Naaman was a leper.

We can scarcely imagine the greatness of this calamity,—the anguish that overwhelmed his proud spirit, the sorrow that pervaded his house. "The basest slave in Syria," says Bishop

[1] M. G. Pearse.

Hall, "would not change skins with him, if he might have his honour to boot. Thus hath the wise God thought wise to sauce the valour, dignity, renown, victories of the famous general of the Syrians." No wonder that the little slave girl who attended upon his wife was touched with pity, and, remembering the miraculous power of the great prophet of her country, said to her mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!"

¶ Leprosy was feared and fled from in Israel as the stroke of God. Leprosy was the most fearful and the most hateful disease known to man. Leprosy was so loathsome, and so utterly incurable and deadly, that it was not looked on as an ordinary disease at all, but rather as a special creation in His anger, and a direct curse of God, both to punish sin, and, at the same time, to teach His people something of what an accursed thing sin really is; till the whole nature of leprosy and all the laws laid down for its treatment, and the miraculous nature of its so seldom cure, all combined to work into the imagination, and into the conscience, and into the heart, and into the ritual, and into the literature of Israel, some of her deepest lessons about the terrible nature and the only proper treatment of sin.[1]

3. At this distance we may pass lightly over his misfortune and think of his character, which still lives before us in that page, so fiery and generous, so proudly sensitive, and yet so responsive to the voice of reason, till, as we dwell on this, we feel a touching appropriateness in the blessing which he receives, when his flesh comes again like the flesh of a little child. And have we not also felt the impressive contrast of worldly and spiritual grandeur, of that which fills the imagination and that which commands the soul, when the great captain comes with his chariot and his horses and stands before the door of a plain man's dwelling, and the prophet without moving from his seat sends forth his message by another?

It was then that Naaman learned a lesson which many an ingenuous heart like his has learned through suffering, though some pass through life without learning it—that the truest blessings, the truest gifts, are often those which we are tempted to despise as common. It is a lesson which only experience can teach to those who need it, and yet it is not in vain to repeat it

[1] A. Whyte.

often in a time when it is much forgotten, and when the marvellous, the exciting, the new and striking, are taking the place of the wise and just and true.

¶ Men have been saved from ruin by a grasp of the hand, a kind word, a generous deed. A bunch of flowers in a dingy and dirty tenement has started thoughts and memories that have meant the resurrection of a soul. A tear, a smile, have done for some spirits in the prisons of sorrow or sin what all the wealth of the Indies could never do. So possible is it to pack untold wealth into such small bulk. A ray of sunshine from some bright life will work a rainbow upon the tears of some forlorn sufferer. The best gifts are, after all, the easiest given.[1]

¶ I have sometimes thought that there seems to be a peculiar potency in the smaller gifts, representing, as they often do, the greatest, most devoted sacrifice. Could we trace the intricate crossings of the lines of influence in the web of life, we would be awed many times at the potency of the giving that is small in amount but tinted red with the life-blood of sacrifice.[2]

A chance remark, or a song's refrain,
And life is never the same again!
A glimpse of a face in a crowded street,
And afterwards life is incomplete.
A friendly smile, and love's embering spark
Leaps into flame, and illumines the dark;
A whispered "Be brave" to our fellow-men,
And they pick up the thread of hope again.
Thus never an act, or word, or thought,
But that with unguessed importance is fraught;
For small things build up eternity,
And blazon the way for a destiny.

I.

Naaman's Anger.

The directions given by the prophet were plain and specific. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Could anything be more explicit? One would have thought that Naaman would have been glad to have had a certain cure promised him on such easy condi-

[1] C. Silvester Horne, in *Youth and Life*, 68.
[2] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Service*, 180.

tions. But no. His pride had been humbled; the prophet had not shown him proper respect; he had proposed a condition which was ridiculous on the face of it. If the prophet had nothing better for him, he might as well turn home at once.

The directions as to salvation are clear as day. He that runs may read them. "Believe and live." "Repent, and your sins shall be blotted out." The blessing is assured the moment the condition is fulfilled; yet many hesitate. They say: "That is too easy a way; there is surely something more to do." But that is God's way, and God's way is the right way.

¶ On the West Coast I stood one day on the cliffs whilst a man pointed out a reef of rocks about which the wild seas foamed, and told me of an Austrian barque that in some fierce storm had struck upon the rocks, indeed was flung up on them by some huge sea. The rocket apparatus was on the spot and fired the rocket right over the ship, so that the rope was made fast in the rigging. Instantly every sailor on the ship rushed below, and not a man was to be seen. There was the rope attached, and there hung the board in half-a-dozen languages directing as to its use. They knew that the seas would rend the ship to pieces very soon and all must perish. At last this man could stand it no longer, and getting into the buoy he went down to the ship, and in at the forecastle he flung the painted board. A score of frightened faces looked up in terror at him. They took the board and read it; hastily they explained it to one another, and crept forth wondering. Then one, then another, availed himself of the apparatus, until all were safely on shore; and, overwhelmed with gratitude, they fell on the necks of their deliverers and wept and kissed them in their great joy. "*We thought you wanted to shoot and kill us*," they explained in their broken English.[1]

1. *Naaman was angry with the Prophet.*—Why did not Elisha come out? Was it because he wanted to humble Naaman? Such might be the way of men, but the way of God, and of God's servants, is not so cold, so calculated, so pitiless, or the Gospel had been long ago undone. Elisha had no power to heal the leprosy. He had no power to come out and wave his hand over the spot and recover the leper. We see how, in the case of the dead child, "he went in, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord," his heart all pity, his soul all open to the whisper of God's voice, and the whole man ready to hear and obey

[1] M. G. Pearse.

the revelation of His will. No; it is no cold and haughty prophet that we see within that lowly dwelling seeking to humble Naaman. It is one whose heart is filled with pity for a case that is pitiable indeed; a great man by whom the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria, but a leper. And in his pity Elisha sees not the horses and chariots and gifts, but the leper.

¶ Pride, arrogance, conceit, and self-will stand in the way of men's receiving God's blessing. Naaman's conduct was typical. Every day men are betrayed by these malign influences into hasty acts and foolish courses, by reason of which they fail to benefit from God's loving-kindness and gracious purpose to do them good. Happy are they who have wise and faithful counsellors in their mothers, wives, children, friends or servants, to suggest better second thoughts and persuade them to heed these and to act sanely, instead of insanely as anger prompts! One act of folly done in a hasty moment may work irreparable mischief, may frustrate God's gracious purpose of mercy, and destroy all chance of fulfilling hopes ardently cherished, to accomplish which we and those who love us have made great endeavours and sacrifices.

2. *Naaman was angry at the Message.*—Not only was Naaman angry at what he considered the want of respect shown by the prophet, but he was also angry at the message. Wash and be clean! It seemed to make so light of his sickness.

(1) He wanted something else. He had been thinking the matter over in his own mind, and had pictured to himself what the prophet would do. He said, "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper." And when at last the command came he was displeased, because it was not what he had expected.

It is so common a failing this of Naaman. Instead of subscribing to God, we prescribe to Him. We say, "I thought God would act in this way"; but God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways.

(2) Naaman thought the task too mean, too poor, too unimportant. He failed to recognize that nothing can be unimportant that God's Providence has assigned. Human Nature which is capable of much grandeur of achievement in great things, in special things, often breaks down in the presence of small things. So it was with Naaman. Most assuredly Naaman would have

done any difficult task that had been imposed upon him; but he found it hard to do a very simple thing. He stumbled at the simplicity of the prophet's method of cure, just as many stumble at the simplicity of the Gospel.

We all want to do some great thing—to do what prophets, saints, heroes, and martyrs have done. But the small thing, the commonplace thing, the little trivial duty, the thing that has to be done out of everybody's sight—in the routine of business, home, or school—that seems poor work to do for God. But it is what He wants us to do. We all want to do some great thing. But God wants only a few of us to do the great, extraordinary things. He wants most of us to do the common things of life—the ordinary work of the world—and it is in these common things that we so often fail. Poor Naaman would not have minded doing some great thing, but his soul rebelled at the thought of the trivial task seven times repeated.

¶ God may have great things for us to do; He certainly has small. And in the small He gives us the opportunity to prove the sincerity of our desire to serve Him in what is greater. We must not deceive ourselves with good intentions, or by dreaming that we should act nobly on the larger stage, when it is only too evident that we do not think it worth while to take trouble over the little things, which we wrongly conceive to be beneath our notice. John Eliot, the missionary, was found, on the day of his death, in his eighty-sixth year, teaching the Indian alphabet to a child. When asked why he did it, he replied: "I have prayed God to make me useful in my sphere, and now that I can no longer preach, He leaves me strength to teach this poor child." "If," said John Newton, the City Rector, "as I go home a child has dropped a halfpenny, and by giving it another I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something. I should be glad, indeed, to do greater things, but I will not neglect this."[1]

There are no little things on earth,
  There's nought beneath the Christian's care,
No virtuous deeds of little worth;
  The flower, upon the mountain bare,
Where never came admiring eye,
The Lord has carved as curiously,
Has stained it with as gorgeous dye,
  As though a thousand looks were there.

[1] A. W. Robinson, *The Voice of Joy and Health*, 167.

Deem not the simple charms, that dwell
In gentle tone and smiling face,
The courtesy, that flings a spell
Of winning love and quiet grace
O'er common deeds in silence wrought,
Beneath the Christian's careful thought;
Another love our Lord has taught,
Adorning many a secret place.

Upon the lonely mountain height
He bids His fair young blossoms swell,
For fragrance all and beauty bright
Forth bursting from each dark green shell;
And shall no flowers of courtesie
Within our lowly hamlets be,
To brighten with their fragrance free
The homes where poor men dwell?

Oh! yes, the temple stones of old
Admiring glances ever drew,
All fair and beauteous to behold,
Ranged in their polished order due;
And lovely deeds beseem us all,
The stones in Christ's own temple wall,
And nought is trivial, nought is small,
That we, for His great Name, can do.[1]

¶ A man may easily be forgiven for not doing this or that incidental act of charity, especially when the question is as genuinely difficult and dubious as is the case of mendicity. But there is something quite pestilently Pecksniffian about shrinking from a hard task on the plea that it is not hard enough. If a man will really try talking to the ten beggars who come to his door, he will soon find out whether it is really so much easier than the labour of writing a cheque for a hospital.[2]

¶ Was not the saintly Keble absolutely right when he wrote thus to a friend who had asked counsel on a point of conduct which had perplexed him? "Almost every time I look into the New Testament I feel convinced that the more quietly and calmly one sets about one's duty, the less one breaks through established customs, always supposing them innocent in themselves, the

[1] Cecil Frances Alexander.

[2] G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World.*

more nearly does one act according to the great Exemplar there proposed.[1]

¶ What is a great deed? I saw one recorded the other day in half a dozen simple lines—a deed of heroism performed on the sea by a young fisherman. A fishing boat, named the *Truelight*, containing a father and four sons, was caught in a gale, foundered and sank. Three of the sons were dragged down with it, and instantly drowned. The fourth swam to a floating oar, and was about to seize it, when he observed his father already clinging to it. Well he knew it could not support them both, so he simply said: "Weel, weel, father, I maun just awa'," and he sank to rise no more.[2]

II.

Naaman's Submission.

1. It was well for Naaman that he had faithful and prudent servants, who, without in the least degree trenching upon the respect due from them to him, were yet able and willing to remonstrate affectionately with him, and to show him the unreasonableness of his conduct. Second thoughts came to him; and with an angry man, second thoughts are always best. He listened to reason, and agreed to make the experiment. Perhaps he had no very great heart in the matter; but his case was hopeless, and he at least could be no worse off for trying the prophet's prescription. So he went down to Jordan and dipped in its waters once, twice, thrice, four times, five times, six times, and still no change. He dipped for the seventh time, and lo! a miracle. His leprosy was gone in an instant, "and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child."

2. It was when the will of Naaman was surrendered and the act of obedience completed that the change was wrought. It is in the act of obedience that the Divine blessing always comes. When Jesus bade the ten lepers who came to Him for healing go and show themselves to the priests, it is said that "it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." The cure was wrought when faith was translated into obedience. It is here

[1] *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, xii.
[2] D. Watson, *In Life's School*, 151.

that multitudes fail. They expect the result of obedience before obedience is rendered. They expect to feel the thrill of new life before they have done the bidding of Christ. To obey is to enjoy.

Obedience through strict conformity to God's thought and purpose, as these may be revealed to us, is the ordinary channel through which His benefits flow to us. This is a universal rule operative in every realm of human interest. The laws of life must be obeyed, if we would possess health; the laws of the natural world, if we would harness its mighty forces to enterprises for human welfare; the law of justice, if in our social life and our relations to one another we would fully realize the blessings of Christian civilization; the law of faith, if we would find joy and peace in believing; the rule of humble submission to God's truth—whatever it may demand of us and whithersoever it may lead us—if His will is to be done on earth as it is done in heaven, and the gladness of heaven irradiate our earthly existence in its wide range of experience and duties.

¶ Mr. Gladstone, in a letter which his biographer tells us sets out the great work of religion as he conceived it, writes:—

"There is a beautiful little sentence in the works of Charles Lamb concerning one who had been afflicted. 'He gave his heart to the Purifier, and his will to the Sovereign Will of the Universe.' But there is a speech in the third canto of the *Paradiso*, spoken by a certain Piccardo, which is a rare gem. I will quote only the lines—

> In His Will is our peace. To us all things
> By Him created, or by Nature made,
> As to a central Sea, self-motion brings.

The words are few and simple, and yet they appear to me to have an inexpressible majesty of truth about them, to be almost as if they were spoken by the very mouth of God. It so happened (unless my memory deceives me) I first read that speech on a morning early in the year 1836 which was one of trial. I was profoundly impressed and powerfully sustained, almost absorbed by the words. They cannot be too deeply engraven upon the heart. In short, what we all want is that they should come to us not as an admonition from without, but as an instinct from within. . . . The first state which we are to contemplate with hope and to seek by discipline is that in which our will should be

one with the will of God; not merely shall submit to it, not merely follow after it, but live and move with it, even as the pulse of the blood in the extremities acts with the central movement of the heart."

¶ A woman's position is one of subjection, mythically described as a curse in the Book of Genesis. Well, but I ween that all curses are blessings in disguise. Labour among thorns and thistles—man's best health. Woman's subjection? What say you to His? "Obedient," a "servant"; *wherefore* God also hath highly exalted Him. Methinks a thoughtful, high-minded Woman would scarcely feel degraded by a lot which assimilates her to the divinest Man: "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." I have always conceived that you had learned to count that ministry the sublimest life which the world has seen and its humiliation and subjection precisely the features which were most divine. The Greeks at Corinth wanted that part to be left out, and it was exactly that part which St. Paul would not leave out—Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ *crucified*. Trust me, a noble woman laying on herself the duties of her sex, while fit for higher things—the world has nothing to show more like the Son of Man than that. Do you remember Wordsworth's beautiful lines to Milton?—

> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
> Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
> So didst thou travel on life's common way,
> In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
> The lowliest duties on herself did lay.[1]

3. It is well at times to shift the emphasis from faith to obedience. St. Paul preached "for obedience to the faith." Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Christians purify their souls "in obeying the truth." Men are lost because they "obey not the gospel of Christ." The Gospel is not only something to be believed, it is something to be obeyed. Let no one wait for feeling. Obey, and feeling will come. Wash in the blood of Jesus, and the leprosy of sin will instantly pass away. Fill up the measure of your obedience, and the life and joy of heaven will come into your heart.

¶ When once thou art well grounded in this Inward Worship thou wilt have learnt to live in God above Time and Place. For

[1] F. W. Robertson, in *Life and Letters*, 208.

every day will be a Sunday to thee, and wherever thou goest thou wilt have a Priest, a Church, and an Altar along with thee. For when God has all that He should have of thy Heart, when renouncing the Will, Judgment, Tempers, and Inclinations of thy old Man, thou art wholly given up to the obedience of the Light and Spirit of God within thee, to will only His will, to love only in His love, to be wise only in His wisdom; then it is that everything thou doest is as a Song of Praise, and the common Business of thy Life is a conforming to God's Will on Earth, as Angels do in Heaven.[1]

4. He who, like Naaman, has been brought to try the Divine remedy, has proved its perfect efficacy. He has found that the cleansing fountain of Jesus' blood has done more than merely purge away his sins. Naaman was not merely cleansed, but made "as a little child"; a new-born life, so to speak, was given him. And so with the sinner washed in the blood of Christ. He gets more than cleansing, he has a new life imparted to him, and that is life in resurrection, for he is made a partaker of the life of his risen Lord.

¶ "How," asks the disciple in Jacob Behmen's *Supersensual Life*, "How shall I be able to subsist in all this anxiety and tribulation so as not to lose the eternal peace?" And the Master answers: "If thou dost once every hour throw thyself by faith beyond all creatures into the abysmal mercy of God, into the sufferings of our Lord, and into the fellowship of His intercession, and yieldest thyself fully and absolutely thereunto, then thou shalt receive grace from above to rule over death and the devil, and to subdue hell and the world under thee. And, then, thou mayest not only endure in all manner of temptation, but be actually the better and the brighter because of thy temptations."

[1] William Law.

The Visible and the Invisible.

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THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE.

And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.—2 Kings vi. 17.

1. IT is an old Hebrew story. Do we not hear it said sometimes that we ought to let the sins and virtues of the Israelites go, and talk to the present century about its own affairs? But what we want is not to let the wonderful history of that ancient people go, but rather to study it far more deeply and wisely. We want to save our present life from being a poor extemporized thing by seeing how God was teaching lessons for this age of ours, and for every age, centuries ago. Never was there a history in which God's working was so manifest; never was there a nation whose evil and whose good were so suggestive. We cannot know how much tamer these halls of our common humanity would seem if they no longer felt the tread and echoed to the voices of the giants of the Old Testament—Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, and Elisha.

2. "And Elisha." Let us recall the facts which led up to the situation depicted in our text. The king of Syria was making war upon Israel, and the prophet Elisha knew and exposed his plans. The king sent out to capture and destroy the troublesome prophet. He sent a whole army, "horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host with horses and chariots was round about the city." The great host shows the terror which Elisha had inspired, and the importance attached to getting possession of him. It is an odd instance of the inconsistency of the Syrian king that it never occurs to him that Elisha, who knew all his schemes, might know this one too, or that horses and chariots were of little

use against a man who had Heaven to back him. "His servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see."

I.

The Visible.

1. "Open his eyes, that he may see." Was the young man asleep, then, or was he blind? Not the least, in the sense usually attached to those terms. This young man was as wide-awake as most of us; his eyes were as bright and as quick, as clear and far-seeing as those of a sailor at the mast-head. He had only just run in breathless to tell Elisha what he had seen—a mighty army with glittering swords, prancing steeds, and chariots well manned with soldiers, their breastplates reflecting the sheen of the sunlight. Oh yes, he could see well enough as far as the physical organ of sight is concerned, and yet he was dark with a blindness which defies the skill of the ophthalmist—brain-blindness, heart-blindness, soul-blindness, a blindness which enables a man to see only the material husks of things, and to believe that they are all; a blindness which discerns nothing of the spiritual presences and the spiritual significances with which God's world is full.

2. And how insistent the visible is. Our seen surroundings are so palpable and so evident. They press in upon the spirit, and, by their strong insistence, claim to be recognized. Day by day every man works out his destiny under their influence and power. And many of them are hurtful to the spirit and harmful to the life. There is the glitter of the recent light which extinguishes for us the patient shining of the deathless stars. There is the false standard of life which does so much to make us forget life's highest greatness. The voices, clamant, and even strident, which fill the ears with their Babel, are all about us. These things are the setting of the lives of us all.

¶ Ruskin's strength lay in his intense perception of what was there; but he was a moralist and not a poet; he had little sense of symbols, he had little touch of music in his composition. He

saw the light on things so clearly that he did not see the hidden light that falls through things. "I was only interested," he wrote, "by things near me, or at least clearly visible and present." He paid a heavy penalty for this in his days of later darkness; but in those early days, the rapture of light and colour and form so filled his heart and mind that he did not see those further secrets which can only be guessed at and perceived, hardly shared or uttered, but the truth of which, if a man has once tasted them, has a sacredness that is beyond all words.[1]

3. If we see only these things, what is the natural result? It is fear. Fear darkening to bewildered helplessness is reasonable to men who see only the material and visible dangers and enemies that beset them. The wonder is, not that we should sometimes be afraid, but that we should ever be free from fear, if we look only at visible facts. Worse foes ring us round than those whose armour glittered in the morning sunshine at Dothan, and we are as helpless to cope with them as that frightened youth was. Any man who calmly reflects on the possibilities and certainties of his life will find abundant reason for a sinking heart. So much that is dreadful and sad may come, and so much must come, that the boldest may well shrink, and the most resourceful cry, "Alas, how shall we do?"

¶ Moses looked with his eyes and saw Israel enslaved. He saw his people downtrodden and oppressed, poor and despised, smitten and apparently hopeless. An ordinary man would have despaired. He would have said, "Nothing can be done with these dumb slaves," but Moses looked beyond the visible and saw Israel emancipated. He saw the light of Canaan on the far horizon. The vision stiffened his courage. He broke through conventionalism, threw down worldly ambition, walked out of the palace, and, setting his face towards the desert, began forty years of stern preparation for real leadership.

¶ On one occasion M. Coillard started on a peace mission to a neighbouring tribe of Zulus. The party consisted of himself and Nathanael Makotoko with their respective followers. Makotoko "was M. Coillard's devoted friend and disciple, but not yet a Christian, and he was intensely superstitious. It was mid-winter; they had to travel as much as possible by night, to avoid being seen by the enemy; the Drakensberge were covered with snow; they had not enough to eat or to cover themselves, and the fearful

[1] A. C. Benson, *Ruskin: A Study in Personality*, 28.

cold reduced their spirits to the lowest ebb. To their dismay, the very first evening they met an ant-eater, or aardvark, a creature which very rarely shows itself by day, and which the Basutos regard as an infallible herald of misfortune. All, including the ambassador himself—Makotoko—wanted to turn back at once, but M. Coillard would not allow them, reminding them that, as messengers of peace, they had a Divine escort. The Basutos, however, saw no chariots of fire, and as they met with many adventures, they exclaimed in chorus at every critical moment: 'The ant-eater, Moruti, the ant-eater, you see!'"[1]

Anoint my eyes that I may see
Through all this sad obscurity,
This worldly mist that dims my sight,
These crowding clouds that hide the light.

Full vision, as perhaps have they
Who walk beyond the boundary way,
I do not seek, I do not ask,
But only this,—that through the mask,

Which centuries of soil and sin
Have fashioned for us, I may win
A clearer sight to show me where
Truth walks with faith divine and fair.[2]

II.

The Invisible.

Elisha fell upon his knees and prayed, "Lord, open his eyes, that he may see." It is quite clear, then, that this keen-sighted young man did not see everything. Had there been nothing more to see, Elisha's prayer would have been mockery. The prophet's eyesight was no better than his servant's, and both looked out on the same hills and downs. But there were wonders there for the prophet that the prophet's servant had quite failed to find. And the distinguishing element was God.

¶ It is the Unknown Quantity that troubles men, and gives them to feel that after they have completed their arithmetic their conclusion is wrong. Christ tells us of the rich man who made

[1] *Coillard of the Zambesi*, 127. [2] Norah Perry.

a map of his estate, and drew it in beautiful and vivid and graphic lines, and had interesting plans for new barns and great storehouses; and when it was all done, he said: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But—then that Unknown Voice was heard—"but God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." The one thing that knocked all his plans into confusion was the Forgotten Factor.[1]

Let us look first at Christ invisible to our natural sight, and second at Christ invisible to our spiritual sight.

1. *Christ Invisible our Glory.*—Religion is nothing, if not an appeal to the invisible. It is based on the conviction of invisible spirit, and implies spiritual converse and communion. The untutored pagan associates with his idol or image some hidden being or power; and while this does not prevent the materializing of religion, it raises it above mere fetishism or materialism. And for us the conception of the invisibleness of our Saviour is a very real help to spirituality.

(1) Christ invisible is a standing protest against a materializing conception of human nature. Man will worship; but for him to worship at the shrine of the visible and material alone would be to enter into the spirit of the beast that goeth downward. Men take after what they worship, and are moulded upon their conceptions of the God they serve. For it is just "as He is, so are we in this world." And the converse also holds good—"as we ourselves are, so will we fashion the object we worship." Low conceptions here mean low conceptions of ourselves, of our nature, our life, and the nature, life, and claims of others.

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
> This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
> The winds that will be howling at all hours,
> And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
> For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
> It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,

[1] L. A. Banks.

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.[1]

(2) The conception of a Christ invisible is a standing protest against mere materializing of worship and religious ordinances. We have a twofold nature indeed, and both sides of it must engage in and be served and suited by worship. While we are "in the body" we need outward help to worship, yet "bodily service" profiteth little, and may be easily divorced from a worship in spirit. We have ever to guard against turning God's worship into a formality or parade of mere ritual and ceremonial observance. Religion, to be of any vital worth, must have a truly spiritual principle at its centre, so as to maintain a solid core of vital heat.

(3) Christ's invisibleness is a standing protest against a materializing estimate of His own life upon earth. The most materialistic view of that earthly life is to regard it as something detached from the ever-abiding life of His which is set forth in His own great word, "Lo, I am with you alway." Christ invisible is the assurance to us of His abiding life and action, still as real and true as any life and action of His on earth, when He walked on it in bodily form centuries ago. Christ invisible attests the ever-living, the ever-present, the ever-operative Lord and Redeemer.

2. *Christ Invisible our Shame.*—It has been said that classification of men in respect of religion will have to be changed, that no longer shall we divide them into Catholic and Protestant, Churchmen and Dissenters, Presbyterian and Methodist, but into men who see Christ and men who do not.

¶ I go to some respectable pew-holder in my church and I say to him, "My friend, do you believe in God?" Affrighted and indignant he turns round on me and asks, "What do you take me for? A pagan? An atheist? Of course I believe in God." And then my doubt as to his belief in God deepens, for when a man answering such a question can say that he believes as a matter of course, I begin to doubt whether he has ever gone through the Gethsemanes of brain-sweat and heart-sweat

[1] Wordsworth.

essential to the mastery of that truth which is not a matter of course, which has to be worked for, wrestled for, prayed for, waited for, suffered for, by some of us through long years of varied agony of mind and of flesh. But I say to my friend, "Tell me something of this God in whom you believe." And immediately he goes back, guided by the information of the Bible, and he describes to me the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of David and Isaiah, the God revealed in Christ, the God who inspired the apostolic age. And I then ask him, "What more?" and he turns right round from the far past to the far future, and he tells me of God who, somewhere and somewhen, when the shadows of all have been dissipated and the sins of all have been washed out, will then live and walk in the midst of His people, a reconciled and recognized Father and Friend. But when I push the inquiry, "What about London to-day, what about our life to-day, our problems, our burdens, our necessities?" then it seems to me that there is for him just one vast arch from the far past to the far future, and that under that arch there is an infinite void in which there is no God. There are plenty of men who believe in God who do not see Him, do not know Him, do not feel His living contact, do not respond with the glow and gladness of their whole being to His close and intimate and redeeming relations.[1]

O distant Christ! the crowded, darkening years
Drift slow between Thy gracious face and me;
My hungry heart leans back to look for Thee,
But finds the way set thick with doubts and fears.

My groping hands would touch Thy garment's hem,
Would find some token Thou art walking near;
Instead they clasp but empty darkness drear,
And no diviner hands reach out to them!

Sometimes my listening soul, with bated breath,
Stands still to catch a footfall by my side,
Lest, haply, my earth-blinded eyes but hide
Thy stately figure, leading Life and Death;

My straining eyes, O Christ, but long to mark
A shadow of Thy presence, dim and sweet,
Or far-off light to guide my wandering feet,
Or hope for hands prayer-beating 'gainst the dark.

[1] C. A. Berry.

O Thou! unseen by me, that like a child
  Tries in the night to find its mother's heart,
  And weeping, wanders only more apart,
Not knowing in the darkness that she smiled—

Thou, all unseen, dost hear my tired cry,
  As I, in darkness of a half belief,
  Grope for Thy heart, in love and doubt and grief:
O Lord! speak soon to me—"Lo, here am I."[1]

III.

The Invisible Visible.

"The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

There are some spheres where the holden eyes are blessed. We do not forget that it is the great compassion of God that keeps us half-blind from the cradle to the grave. They darken the bird's cage, they tell us, when they teach it to sing; and unless the covering hand of the Almighty darkened the windows here, we should never sing, and never be strong at all. It is God's mercy that I do not see the future. It was God's grace that the mother's eyes were sealed, when long years ago she crooned her babe to sleep; and her heart was radiant, and she dreamed her dreams—and where is her wandering boy to-night? If we had known, if we had seen, could we have stood it? It was compassion that hung that curtain on to-morrow. Do not forget that. Do not be blind to the untold blessings of our blindness. But we are not pleading for vision for to-morrow. We are pleading for the recognition of the Spiritual, and for its recognition to-day. It is to-day that there are horses and chariots round us. It is to-day that there are promises and helps for us. It is to-day that Christ stands at the door and knocks. "Lord, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man" there at once.

1. The Spiritual vision does not come to all. Why? we ask. And the answer seems to be that they have *not fulfilled the conditions.*

[1] Margaret Wade Deland.

(1) The first is being in the *right place*. Elisha was in a great difficulty, in a very strait place, but he was where it was right for him to be. When St. Paul was in his dark prison at Rome the Lord stood by him and strengthened him; when our Saviour bore His cruel agony in Gethsemane, an angel from heaven came to strengthen Him. When John Bunyan was thrust into the dismal prison on Bedford Bridge, we know what bright visions he saw, and how his dark cell was made glorious as he dreamed his wonderful dreams. Yes, but the secret of their strength was that they all were where God would have them be.

> There are open hours
> When the God's will sallies free,
> And the dull idiot might see
> The flowing fortunes of a thousand years;—
> Sudden, at unawares,
> Self-moved, fly-to the doors,
> Nor sword of angels could reveal
> What they conceal.[1]

(2) The second condition is *prayer*. It may be the prayer of another for us. "Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see." He prayed God to grant the youth the same open eyes, the same spiritual vision as he himself enjoyed. But we may be our own prophet, and pray this prayer for the opened eye ourselves—"Lord, that I may receive my sight."

(3) *Purity* is of course essential, and if evil thoughts have blurred the vision, these must be got rid of. Direct attack will not expel them; often the very effort and attention employed in combating them seem to increase their vividness. But the occupation of the mind with healthy interests will drive them out to make room for better company. And the vision is nearer to those who live keenly, with delight in the wholesome things that work and play offer them, than to those who stand aloof and seek for light by ascetic withdrawal.

¶ Of the knights of the Round Table, Sir Galahad was the one whose strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure. And while all the knights sought to see the Holy

[1] Emerson.

Grail, it was to this pure-hearted knight that the Vision was first given.

> For such
> As thou art is the vision, not for these.

(4) *Peace* also is essential. Sometimes, indeed, the vision flashes upon the battlefield, but that is an act of God for which we can make little arrangement. But when life is crowded with work and worry it is sometimes possible to "have courage to rest," and it is not only the pure heart that sees God, but also the quiet heart.

¶ Peace is, indeed, a priceless gift to the aged saints of God; it is infinitely precious to those who are called to face Death—and which of us is not called to face Death? I have seen it shining in the glad eyes of a friend who was about to undergo a very dangerous operation. She had no thought of fear, knowing that whether she lived or died she was absolutely safe in God's care. And I saw it again, a few days later, when she greeted me with a beautiful smile. She knew, and her doctor and nurses knew, that it was worth a great deal to her—as a help towards recovery—to have her head (which appeared to be supported only by a tiny hospital pillow, about an inch thick) really "leaning back on Jesus' breast."[1]

(5) And *patience* is often demanded if we would see—the patient attendance upon that which is fine and good. For a time Christ may seem uninteresting and His ideals dull; but in reality they are the very splendour of God, and the soul that seeks shall find. There are stars so distant that no eye can see them, yet the photographic telescope, pointed steadily to their field of darkness where they hide, receives their infinitesimal shafts of light, and their images are seen upon the plate. So, though the night be dark, the soul that turns away from lower things and resolutely points toward Christ, will yet see the image of the King in His beauty, and behold a land that is very far off.

> Lay thine uphill shoulder to the wheel,
> And climb the Mount of Blessing, whence, if thou
> Look higher, then—perchance—thou mayest—beyond
> A hundred ever-rising mountain lines,

[1] D. Farncomb, *The Vision of His Face*, 135.

And past the range of Night and Shadow—see
The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
Strike on the Mount of Vision!
So, farewell.[1]

2. *The Vision.*—"The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." The chariots of fire, indeed, and horses of fire, were, in one sense, unreal; that is, they were not of flesh, nor obvious to human sense: they were unearthly powers, who assumed a form by which they could make an impression of truth on the distrustful fleshly mind of the prophet's servant. There were no chariots there, nor horses; but there were spiritual hosts, who showed themselves before the imagination of the young man to be more than a match for the army of besiegers. Thus a great truth from heaven, a reality as lasting and as wide as the universe, was taught him—that, beyond our eyes and ears, a majestic, spiritual world is moving on in silence; that an unseen God has infinite, unseen resources; that the causes and issue of things lie outside the horizon of the senses; that immense agencies may be at work in all stillness and without the slightest show, of which the worldly mind does not so much as dream.

The teeming air and prodigal,
Which droops its azure over all,
Is full of immortalities
That look on us with unseen eyes.[2]

(1) When we speak of our unseen spiritual helpers we go with timid feet, not sure of the ground we walk on and yet sure that there is ground, and irresistibly impelled to feel for it and find it. We cannot separate ourselves from the great human conviction that beside the supreme personal life of God, which is the source of all existence, there are other spiritual beings, of many varying orders, who do His will, who help His children, and are the emanations of His life in other worlds, as man is here in this grosser world of flesh and blood. The Divine existence multiplies itself. The company of spiritual beings who surround Him with their loyalty and love, the angels in countless orders sweeping upward, from the ministers of man's lower wants up to those who stand nearest to the throne—all these in some belief

[1] Tennyson, *The Ancient Sage.* [2] Philip P. Cooke.

or other have been included in the faith of every race of men, of almost every man, who has come to the knowledge of a spiritual world and trusted in a God.

¶ There is nothing clearer or more striking in the Bible than the calm, familiar way with which, from end to end, it assumes the present existence of a world of spiritual beings always close to and acting on this world of flesh and blood. It does not belong to any one part of the Bible. It runs throughout its whole vast range. From creation to judgment, the spiritual beings are for ever present. They act as truly in the drama as the men and women who with their unmistakable humanity walk the sacred stage in the successive scenes. There is nothing of hesitation about the Bible's treatment of the spiritual world. There is no reserve, no vagueness which would leave a chance for the whole system to be explained away into dreams and metaphors. The spiritual world with all its multitudinous existence is just as real as the crowded cities, and the fragrant fields and the loud battle-grounds of the visible and palpable Judea in which the writers of the sacred books were living. You take away the unseen world with all its unseen actors from the story, and you have not merely made the Bible like other books, you have set it below other books; for you have taken the colour out of all its life, the motive out of all its action.[1]

It lies around us like a cloud,—
  A world we do not see;
Yet the sweet closing of an eye
  May bring us there to be.

Its gentle breezes fan our cheek;
  Amid our worldly cares,
Its gentle voices whisper love,
  And mingle with our prayers.

Sweet hearts around us throb and beat,
  Sweet helping hands are stirred,
And palpitates the veil between
  With breathings almost heard.

The silence, awful, sweet, and calm,
  They have no power to break;
For mortal words are not for them
  To utter or partake.

[1] Phillips Brooks.

So thin, so soft, so sweet, they glide,
  So near to press they seem,
They lull us gently to our rest,
  And melt into our dream.

And in the hush of rest they bring
  'Tis easy now to see
How lovely and how sweet a pass
  The hour of death may be;—

To close the eye and close the ear,
  Wrapped in a trance of bliss,
And gently dream in loving arms,
  To swoon to that—from this,—

Scarce knowing if we wake or sleep,
  Scarce asking where we are,
To feel all evil sink away,
  All sorrow and all care.

Sweet souls around us! watch us still;
  Press nearer to our side;
Into our thoughts, into our prayers,
  With gentle helpings glide.

Let death between us be as naught,
  A dried and vanished stream:
Your joy be the reality,
  Our suffering life the dream.[1]

(2) But the Bible goes farther. It not merely believes in and everywhere assumes the existence of spiritual beings; it also believes that to certain conditions, even of our fleshly humanity, these beings become visible. There is an opening of the eyes that lets us see what is going on in this finer purer region round about us all the time. Is not this the idea of life that the Bible gives us, as if we were blind men walking in the midst of a great city, hearing its noise, feeling its jostling, and now and then in some peculiar moments of our life opening our eyes, catching one sudden flash of the movement that is going on around us and then shutting them again and taking the moment's sight back with us into the darkness, to ponder over and too

[1] Harriet Beecher Stowe.

often, by and by, to come to doubt whether we really saw it? So here and there an eye is opened; and to that keener sense it is recorded that spiritual beings made themselves visible, as if it were no stranger a thing than for the opened eye of the flesh to see the sparkling splendour of the Temple and the Mount of Olives and the high priest walking down the street, and all the familiar scenery of Jerusalem. The Hebrew maiden goes about her pure and simple life in Nazareth, and she opens her eyes and sees the messenger who hails her as the highly favoured of her Lord; the shepherds are watching in the fields, and suddenly they see the angels as truly and as clearly as they see the stars. The women go to the sepulchre, and there sit the ministers beside the place where Jesus lay. St. Paul rides towards Damascus, and lo! he has fallen from his horse and hears a voice which is intelligible to him alone. What shall we say? There is no doubt of what the Bible teaches, and it is what the human heart, taught by God through its own deepest instincts, has always guessed at and believed—that this world of fleshly life is not all, that everywhere there is a realm of spiritual life close to us, and that there is an inner sense to which, when it is awakened, these spiritual beings have often been actually visible and have given words of cheer and guidance and encouragement to toiling and discouraged men.

¶ "Tell me something of your Sunday night's sermon on 'The Angel and the Ass,'" I said to him when we had settled ourselves down in his study on the Thursday before his death. I had heard many references to that sermon, and to the profound impression it had produced. Berry fenced a little, but at last began. I shall never forget that half-hour. He was as interested in the theme (and what wonder!) and grew almost as earnest as he had been in the pulpit on the Sunday evening. The drift of his thought, as well as I can recall it, was that we are all too prone to regard the lower rather than the higher ministries that help our life on earth—to have eyes for the ass but none for the angel, and that it is only when our eyes are open to see the angel that the best of God can reach us. I can see him now—the fine expressive face illumined with the light of a wondrous tenderness that shone in those clear, beautiful eyes as he quoted one of his illustrations. "Three months ago, when I was lying a poor, helpless, pain-racked man yonder in Southport, a letter reached me from a friend, a letter full of sympathy and concern and genuine affection. But in the letter was this sentence: 'If any one tells you, as

plenty of people are sure to have done, that God has sent you this suffering, don't believe him. God never sends suffering, not even to sweeten and strengthen men, although He does strengthen them in spite of the suffering. Believe me, dear friend, your sufferings were sent by the devil; *he* is the sole author of pain. The devil owes you many a grudge for the hard blows you have given him in Wolverhampton and elsewhere, and now he is going to stop you if he can. Don't blame God for this, but pray to Him to put down Satan under your feet.' 'Ah!' said Berry, 'I thank my friend with all my heart. I know well he meant to comfort me. But,' and, as he leaned towards me, the look on his face was that of a man who had seen God, and learned His secret, '*I am not going to let him rob me of my angel.*'"[1]

(3) This generation is very fond of quoting the text, "no man hath seen God at any time," and adds, "nor can see Him." It is a pity that they do not rather go on with the quotation itself and say, "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Jesus Christ is the Revealer. The irradiation of His brightness, "and the express image of his person," is that Divine man, God manifest in the flesh. The knowledge of God which we have in Jesus Christ is real, as sight is real. It is not complete, but it is genuine knowledge. We know the best of God, if we may use such a phrase, when we know what we know in Christ, that He is a loving and a righteous will; when we can say of Him, "He is love," in no metaphor but in simple reality; and His will towards all righteousness, and towards all blessing, anything that heaven has to teach us about God afterwards is less than that. We see Him in the reality of a genuine, central, though by no means complete, knowledge.

¶ Jesus brought the righteousness of God and made it manifest, a clear fact where all men could read it. He laid it like a new silver light across the murky surfaces that we are all familiar with. He made the lives of fishermen and publicans the scaffolding on which He hung its exhibition. And so, too, He made the purposes of God the great important lines along which all existence ran. He let us see that the course of the great nations and the current of quiet lives were all running the way that one supreme and omnipresent will had chosen. And of the love of God, what shall we say? He wove its records everywhere. He spun it in the colour of the lily and made us hear it

[1] J. S. Drummond, *Charles A. Berry*, 208.

in the noiseless fall of the sparrow. He made all sorrow and all joy its ministers. And then at last He hung it on a cross so high that no pride could tower so high as to overlook it, so low that the most abject humility could not fall so low as not to be within its light. This is what Jesus did. He did not bring God into the world. God forbid that we should think that! God had never been out of the world He made and loved. He touched the world with His life and made it everywhere a luminous utterance of God. And then, what else? He opened the blind eyes of every man who would become His servant, and bid him see. He regenerated man. He brought him back, that is, into the first condition, lost so long, in which his eyes were open and he could see the God who was everywhere. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." He redeemed man. He brought him back into the Eden of the perfect reconciliation. Once more he might see God. No longer with the eyes of sense but all the more clearly to the inner vision of the renewed obedient soul, the Lord God walked with man among the trees of the garden of the Christian life.[1]

Because mine eyes can never have their fill
  Of looking at my lady's lovely face,
  I will so fix my gaze
That I may become blessed, beholding her.

Even as an angel up at his great height
Standing amid the light,
  Becometh blessed by only seeing God.[2]

IV.

The Visible Invisible.

1. "The young man saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire." We hear no more of the Syrian host. It was blotted out by God's host.

¶ Have you ever held in your hand one of those puzzle cards which has something clearly evident upon its surface, but which requires you to find something in it that is not so evident? I had one of these cards sent to me; it had printed on it the sketch of a garden, and underneath this printed matter the words, "Here

[1] Phillips Brooks.

[2] Dante, *Canzoniere* ix., tr. by D. G. Rossetti.

is a garden, but where is the gardener?" I took that card, and I held it right way up and wrong way up, and edgeways and lengthways, and upside down, and I would have turned it inside out if I could, but I could not find that gardener, and was just about to give up the task when suddenly by some accident I got the right angle and saw his features begin to form until, whereas before I could not see anything but the garden, now I could see nothing but the gardener; he filled the whole card and dispelled his garden.[1]

¶ God has taught the human heart to idealize. For nothing can exceed or equal the power of love to see the ideal, and be gripped and swayed by it. The neighbour sees a freckled-faced, short-nosed boy, but the mother sees only a face of beauty, and out of its eye looks a *man* who is going to help to shape and maybe shake the world. The inspector at Ellis Island sees only a couple of bundles being tugged and lugged along by some skirts and a bright-coloured shawl, but the young husband impatiently waiting at the gate, whose hard-earned savings have brought her over, sees the winsome maiden whose face still holds him in thrall.[2]

2. The Syrian host was still there, but God's host was between. So is it that the army of God camps between the trusting soul and its enemies. We have seen the armies of sorrow encamp around a good man. One after another, as in the case of Job, messages of bereavement have come to his sorrowing ears, and we have looked to see how he would take it. We have wondered if he would be able to bear up under it, or whether his heart would grow hard and bitter, and sorrow would capture his soul and break down his faith. But as the hosts of sorrow gathered about his head, we have rejoiced to see that his faith grew stronger and his eye grew brighter with the hope of heaven. His countenance became more mellow and tender and sympathetic; it glowed with "a light that never was on sea or land," and he seemed to have a glimpse of that city which Abraham beheld, "whose builder and maker is God." What is the secret of it? Inside the army of sorrows that encompassed him were encamped the angels of God.

¶ I have seen a man who has been rescued from terrible sins and cruel appetites beset by a legion of devilish lusts and

[1] C. A. Berry.

[2] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Home Ideals*, 17.

temptations that clamoured for his soul, and I have wondered if he would be able to beat them down and go on his way with steady step towards heaven. And I have rejoiced as I have watched and witnessed that, despite all the howling and barking of the wolves of temptation, the man grew stronger, his face firmer, his eyes shone with a loftier courage, and his brow was glorified with higher ideals. Then I knew that the secret of it was that between him and the howling pack of devilish temptations were encamped the hosts of God's angels.[1]

3. And now there is no room for fear, for the presence of the horses and chariots of fire means two things.

(1) It means first of all that as long as a child of God is on the path of duty, and until that duty has been fulfilled, he is inviolable and invulnerable. He shall tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shall he trample under his feet. He shall take up the serpent in his hands; and if he drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt him. He shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flieth by day; of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor of the demon that destroyeth in the noonday. A thousand shall fall at his right hand, and ten thousand beside him; but it shall not come nigh him. The histories and the legends of numberless marvellous deliverances all confirm the truth that, when a man fears the Lord, He will keep him in all his ways, and give His angels charge over him, lest at any time he dash his foot against a stone. God will not permit any mortal force, or any combination of forces, to hinder the accomplishment of the task entrusted to His servant. It is the sense of this truth that, under circumstances however menacing, should enable us to bate no jot of heart or hope, but still bear up, and steer onward. It is this conviction that has nerved men to face insuperable difficulties, and achieve impossible and unhoped-for ends. It works in the spirit of the cry, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain!" It inspires the faith as a grain of mustard seed which is able to say to this mountain, "Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea,"—and it shall obey. It stands unmoved upon the pinnacle of the Temple, whereon it has been placed, while the enemy and tempter, smitten by amazement,

[1] L. A. Banks.

falls. This is one lesson conveyed in the words of Christ when the Pharisees told Him that Herod desired to kill Him. He knew that Herod could not kill Him till He had done His Father's will and finished His work. "Go ye," He said, "and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following."

¶ India was still heaving with the ground-swell of the terrible mutiny of 1857 when the wife of Sir John Lawrence was called home to her children in England, and had to leave her husband, who would not quit his post, surrounded by the smouldering embers which might at any moment rekindle into flame, and worn to exhaustion with the anxiety and labour which did so much for the preservation of the Indian empire. She thus writes, "When the last morning of separation, 6th January 1858, arrived, we had our usual Bible reading, and I can never think of the 27th Psalm, which was the portion we then read together, without recalling that sad time" . . . "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? . . . For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion."[1]

(2) But had all this been otherwise—had the child of God perished, as has been the common lot of God's prophets and heroes—he would not therefore have felt himself mocked by these exceeding great and precious promises. The chariots and horses of fire are still there, and are there to work a deliverance still greater and more eternal. Their office is not to deliver the perishing body, but to carry into God's glory the immortal soul. This is indicated in the death-scene of Elijah. This was the vision of the dying Stephen. This was what Christian legend meant when it embellished with beautiful incidents such scenes as the death of Polycarp. This was what led Bunyan to write, when he described the death of Christian, that "all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

The ship may sink,
And I may drink
A hasty death in the bitter sea;
But all that I leave
In the ocean-grave
Can be slipped and spared, and no loss to me.

[1] Archibald Alexander.

What care I,
Though falls the sky,
And the shrivelling earth to a cinder turn?
No fires of doom
Can ever consume
What never was made nor meant to burn.

Let go the breath
There is no death
To the living soul, nor loss, nor harm.
Not of the clod
Is the life of God;
Let it mount, as it will, from form to form.[1]

[1] Charles Gordon Ames.

Knowledge and Service.

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Knowledge and Service.

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind.—1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

1. It was at the very end of his life that David uttered these words. Dark clouds had gathered round him from the time of his great sin. War, famine, and pestilence diminished the numbers, and laid waste the homes, of his subjects; rebellions in his own family, and the death of son after son, afflicted his soul. Yet through all these sorrows the penitent king held fast to God's promises, and found comfort in thinking, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5).

2. Solomon was the first link in the great chain which God's faithful promise had established between David, sin-stained and suffering, and that stainless Sufferer whom the helpless would invoke as the Son of David, and whose distant advent appeared "as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." It was Solomon whom God had chosen to escape the curse which seemed to brood over David's other children, and to build that temple which his father had longed to erect to the glory of God, but which he was not suffered to behold except in vision and devout anticipation. And, accordingly, it is in David's solemn farewell charge to Solomon in the presence of assembled Israel that we see the stormy rain-clouds that obscured his latter days disperse, and his setting sun shine out bright and warm for a few moments, before it sinks beneath our ken. Adonijah's rebellion has been put down. Solomon has

been anointed king in his father's lifetime, to insure his succession to the throne; and, as if by a miracle, his father rises from what had seemed his death-bed, and, endued with almost supernatural strength, commits to his well-beloved son the great work for which he had gone on making preparations so long as health and life served him, but which he now feels that the hour has come for him to resign into other hands.

3. The occasion is an august one. Spectators stand round the princes and chief men of Israel, the great in peace, the mighty in war, representatives of the whole nation. Vast stores of gold and silver from the royal treasury are ready to be given over to meet the expense of the temple-building; costly marbles and precious stones are prepared for its adornment, and the divinely inspired plan of the future work is in the old king's hand. The aged king rapidly reviews his own early wish to build the temple, God's appointment of Solomon in his place, and the condition of obedience to the law on which that successor and his descendants are to hold the kingdom. Then, turning to the young king by his side, he gives him his parting charge: "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." After this follow directions for the building, ending with the words, "The work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God."

¶ The whole picture is one of serene beauty. It shows us that by God's grace no error is irretrievable, no crime inexpiable. No blot rests on the fair fame of our own English kings Henry II. and Edward III. (even allowing, as we ought to do, for the raising by the Gospel of men's moral standard) equal in darkness to that which left its indelible stain on David. Yet how like to his afflictions from his rebellious son were the sorrows of Henry's latter years! how easily might David's last days have resembled those of Crecy's conqueror, as depicted by the poet!—

> Mighty victor, mighty lord,
> Low on his funeral couch he lies!
> No pitying heart, no eye, afford
> A tear to grace his obsequies.

Is the sable warrior fled?
Thy son is gone. He rests among the dead.
The swarm that in thy noontide beam were born?
—Gone to salute the rising morn.

Whence comes it then that with David, instead, "at evening time it is light,"—that he cheerfully directs the hopes of his subjects, the devotions of his servants, to another than himself; and, complaining of no desertion, fearing no evil, dies with his eyes fixed in rapture on the temple of the future, and the king whose wealth and power were to eclipse his own? Simply because he knew that his sin was pardoned; because he could say, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion"; because God had been his "trust from his youth," and was his "strong refuge" in his age; because, by what God had done for him already, he well knew what God could do for him in time to come—so that, standing on the grave's brink, he could say, with assured faith, "Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth."[1]

4. It was a high destiny to which Solomon was called. He was called to build a temple to the Lord. But is it not the very destiny to which each of us is called, only higher in degree, inasmuch as the spiritual temple is higher than the material? This is the great purpose of our life—the building of God's spiritual temple. It rests on the foundation of prophets and apostles, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." And the time will come when the fire will try every man's work therein, of what sort it is. Let us therefore take our share in the honour of that work, lest we should then suffer shame. For us, as for Solomon, provision has been made, a pattern has been given, and it only remains for us to serve in the work with a perfect heart.

5. Two things are spoken of as necessary to the fulfilment of this high calling—*Knowledge* and *Service*.

(1) It is pitched on a lofty key of spiritual religion, for it lays "Know thou the God of thy father" as the foundation of everything. That knowledge is no mere intellectual apprehension, but, as always in Scripture, personal acquaintance with a Person,

[1] E. J. Hasell.

which involves communion with Him and love towards Him. For us, too, it is the seed of all strenuous discharge of our life's tasks, whether we are rulers or nobodies, and it means a much deeper experience than understanding or giving assent to a set of truths about God. We know one another when we summer and winter with each other, and not unless we love one another; and we know God on no other terms.

(2) After such knowledge comes an outward life of service. Active obedience is the expression of inward communion, love, and trust. The spring that moves the hands on the dial is love, and, if the hands do not move, there is something wrong with the spring. Morality is the garment of religion; religion is the animating principle of morality. Faith without works is dead, and works without faith are dead too.

I.

Knowledge.

"Know thou the God of thy father."

1. Knowledge of any kind requires thought and effort. It does not come by chance, in a momentary flash. We must "dig for wisdom as for hid treasure," and digging implies toil. It is said that even Professor Palmer, who was one of our greatest linguists, with a perfect genius for languages, "took advantage of every help offered, and made the most of it." This is equally necessary in the sphere of religious knowledge. True, there is a great difference between the intellectual and the spiritual. No man by mere searching can find out God, for it requires moral and spiritual capacity. As we do not know what love is by reading about it, but only when the feeling itself is awakened within us, so is it with the knowledge of Divine things. Yet this knowledge has its laws and methods, and those will fail to gain it who learn nothing of the Bible, and neglect prayer. Plato had a glimpse of this truth when he distinguished between "knowledge" and "wisdom." In one of his dialogues he describes a young Athenian who sought desperately for some one to teach him wisdom. Poets and philosophers failed him. It was not in them to teach, because it was not in him to learn. We also need a spiritual appetite,

and a spiritual capacity, which God alone can give, before we understand how He "fills the hungry with good things."

¶ Let all our business be to know God: the more one knows Him, the more one desires to know Him. And as knowledge is commonly the measure of love, the deeper and more extensive our knowledge shall be, the greater will be our love; and if our love of God be great, we shall love Him equally in grief and in joy.[1]

2. Knowledge of God has its steps of progress.

(1) It is knowledge of *God as holy*.—Some men regard God in such a way as to believe that however they live, and whatever they believe, all will come right with them in the long-run. But these do not "know" God, in whose presence no evil can stay. The Only-begotten of the Father has revealed Him as He really is, for "God was in Christ." And Christ never made light of sin. He told us more of the power and dreadfulness of evil than the world ever knew before, and He declared that all would appear before the judgment-seat, whether they were good or bad, to receive every man according as his works should be. God would not have said all He did say through the King of Truth, unless sin and its consequences had been dreadful beyond our dreams.

¶ The conception of God, august, majestic, awe-inspiring, is found in the Hebrew prophets as it is found in no other literature in the world. Did Jesus of Nazareth revolt from it? No. He ratified it. He spoke of God as a God of absolute righteousness. It is true His thought of God was always the thought of God as a Father. And in this respect He passed beyond the prophets. While the prophets emphasized our responsibility to God, He drew out the other side and made known God's responsibility for us. But if God is responsible for us as a father is responsible for his children, does that lessen our responsibility to Him? If the judgment on sin is the judgment of a Father, does that make sin less sinful? In that word "Father" everything is contained that is needed to feed and exercise the faculty and instinct of awe. "If ye call on him as Father," said St. Peter, "pass the time of your sojourning here in awe."

O tell me whence that joy doth spring,
Whose diet is divine and fair,
Which wears heaven like a bridal ring,
And tramples on doubts and despair?

[1] Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God.*

Whose Eastern traffique deals in bright
And boundless empyrean themes,
Mountains of spice, day-stars and light,
Green trees of life and living streams?

Sure Holyness the magnet is,
And love the lure that woos thee down:
Which makes the high transcendent bliss
Of knowing thee, so rarely known![1]

(2) It is knowledge of God as *a forgiving God.*—Some think of God as a stern avenger, who cares nothing for our love or our longing. They believe that immutable laws will land one in heaven and another in hell, much as a train whirls passengers up the line, or down it, with no thought or care on their part. If that were true, perhaps the Epicurean maxim would be the wisest to follow: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But Jesus made an atonement for our sins, and came here to save us from them, so that every one who repents may have the blessedness of the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.

¶ I have a pile of bills at home, the accumulation of years. Together those accounts would make up such a large amount that if it were called for I should be ruined. But I can look on them without a shade of anxiety, because every one of them is receipted. No creditor has any claim, and if I were sued in court, I should only have to produce the receipts to be free from condemnation. Thus our moral debts, greater than these, are discharged, and are as if they were not; so that to each penitent believer the Lord says, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."[2]

(3) It is the knowledge of *God as a deliverer.*—David urged Solomon and said, "Know thou the God of thy father." The old king was returning in thought upon the experience of his life. He had sinned and he had been forgiven. But more than pardon had been granted him. He had been delivered from the tyranny of evil passion through much suffering and anguish, and he had been brought into a large place. He was there that day to testify to the good hand of his God upon him. "Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father."

[1] Henry Vaughan. [2] A. Rowland.

¶ When his friends asked Coleridge for a proof of Christianity, they expected an answer that would display the philosopher's powers of acute dialectic. They were surprised at the simplicity of the answer they received—"Try it!" And in truth that is the only satisfactory answer that can be given. In all departments of knowledge we are realizing more than ever that experiment is the final test.[1]

¶ I may be speaking to many a one in a very special sense when I say, "Know thou the God of *thy* father." He may have been a leader, a minister in the Christian church, and you have more than once said to yourself, "If ever any one went to heaven, my father did." For his sake, as well as for your own, I urge you to decision and consecration. There are things hardly worth keeping that you prize for your father's sake—the chair he used to sit in, the Bible he was wont to use—and if you knew of some one he specially loved, you would be good to him if you could. But there is One he did love intensely, and who always loved him; a Friend who never failed, whose grace made him what he was, who welcomed him to His home when the life-journey was ended. Will you longer hesitate to yield yourself to the God of your father?[2]

¶ A life woven in with the history of Missions in China is that of David Hill. He was given to God by a father who was devoted to the work of helping missions from the home end. In his youth he gave his overtime earnings, in all about seventy pounds, to the cause. Later he gave all he could, including his son. The relationship between them was peculiarly close and tender. The father's judgment was the son's highest human standard. Even in China the knowledge of what his father would think and say ruled him still, and once saved his life. He was bathing in the Moon Lake near Hankow, when he got out of his depth. He sank again and again, and was nearly giving up effort, when suddenly the thought came: "What will my father think of me, if I let myself be drowned before I have been of any use in China?" The thought stimulated a final effort, which brought him safely to shore.[3]

¶ I can see my dear father's life in some measure as the sunk pillar on which mine was to rise and be built. I seem to myself only the continuation and second volume of my father. Let me write my books as he built his houses, and walk as blamelessly through this shadow world.[4]

[1] A. W. Robinson, *The Voice of Joy and Health*, 146.
[2] A. Rowland.
[3] H. S. Dyer, *The Ideal Christian Home*, 57.
[4] Carlyle.

II.

Service.

"Serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind."

There is a true service done for God which no one notices. It lies apart from church organizations, and gives no prominence to those who do it, though it is seen, and will be rewarded, by Him who sees in secret. Take a few examples. We may have an opportunity of reading some book which panders to evil passions, and we fling it aside with loathing. We are invited to join a society where mirth is very doubtful in its source, and we decline. Stung by a taunt, we restrain ourselves from the utterance of an angry retort, though it springs to our lips instinctively. Tempted by sensual delights, or by the chance of making money by a bet, we resist triumphantly. Engaged in daily work with others, we refuse to do behind our employer's back what we would not do in his presence; for we say to ourselves, "Thou God seest me," and refrain. In all these and similar experiences we "serve" God with a pure conscience, and thus witness for Him; and at the same time we are building up in ourselves a Christlike character.

¶ At the present time the greatest need seems to be that we should return to the fundamentals of spiritual religion. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that both the old seats of authority, the infallible Church and the infallible Book, are fiercely assailed, and that our faith needs reinforcements. These can only come from the depths of the religious consciousness itself; and if summoned from thence they will not be found wanting. The "impregnable rock" is neither an institution nor a book, but a life or experience. Faith, which is an affirmation of the basal personality, is its own evidence and justification. Under normal conditions it will always be strongest in the healthiest minds. There is and can be no appeal from it. If, then, our hearts, duly prepared for the reception of the Divine Guest, at length say to us, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see," we may, in St. John's words, "have confidence toward God."[1]

But let us also undertake what will more directly serve others. Beginning early in a Guild, a Christian Endeavour or

[1] W. R. Inge.

other Society, let us learn to speak or to pray, for the effort will become difficult as the years slip by. Let us guard against indolence in youth, if we would not become idlers in manhood. And let us not delude ourselves with the idea that we can do great service while meanwhile we do not even attempt small service; for the one fits for the other.

But even when we "know God" we have to make efforts to have our service correspond with our knowledge, for we have wayward hearts and obstinate wills, which need to be stimulated, sometimes to be coerced and forcibly diverted from unworthy objects. Therefore the exhortation to serve God "with a perfect heart and with a willing mind" is always needful and often hard. Entire surrender and glad obedience are the Christian ideal, and continual effort to approximate to it will be ours in the degree in which we "know God." There is no worse slavery than that of the half-hearted Christian whose yoke is not padded with love. Reluctant obedience is disobedience in God's sight.

1. *A perfect heart.*—If "perfect" means sinless, none of us can obey that command. But "perfect" means here undivided. It refers to the work of one who is not thinking partly of his own advantage while professing to please God; who, instead of spasms of piety, has the constant mind, which does not think of God on Sunday only, while forgetting Him all the week. It implies thoroughness also, a service of reality as well as of purpose; and has about it such courage that it waits for no applause and shrinks from no unpopularity.

¶ The "perfect man" of the Old Testament is one who, like David, can dance before the Lord with all his might—that is to be enthusiastic in God's service.[1]

To "serve God with a perfect heart" is the sum and substance of all practical religion. It is required of all persons of all ages, of young as well as of old. It is required that we should endeavour to have our heart and affections *perfect* towards God; that is, that we should love Him more than any or all of the things of this world; that we should be ever seeking what will please Him, and avoiding what will grieve Him; that we should live as in His constant presence, and be thoroughly resigned, and satisfied

[1] A. B. Bruce.

with what He orders for us. This is to serve God with a perfect heart. And it is plain, that any person who endeavours to lead such a life as this, will be very strict with himself, very watchful and suspicious of his own faults and errors, and, as long as he lives, will be striving to grow better, according to the solemn admonition of our Saviour. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

2. *A willing mind.*—To serve with a "willing mind" implies that we are not merely compelled to service by circumstances, or persuaded by friends, or impelled by fear; but that we understand what the Psalmist said and Jesus quoted about Himself: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."

O Christian soldier! shouldst thou rue
Life and its toils, as others do—
Wear a sad frown from day to day,
And garb thy soul in hodden-gray?
Oh! rather shouldst thou smile elate,
Unquelled by sin, unawed by hate,—
Thy lofty-statured spirit dress
In moods of royal stateliness;—
For say, what service so divine
As that, ah! warrior heart, of thine,
High pledged alike through gain or loss,
To thy brave banner of the cross?

Yea! what hast *thou* to do with gloom,
Whose footsteps spurn the conquered tomb?
Thou, that through dreariest dark canst see
A smiling immortality?

Leave to the mournful, doubting slave,
Who deems the whole wan earth a grave,
Across whose dusky mounds forlorn
Can rise no resurrection morn,
The sombre mien, the funeral weed,
That darkly match so dark a creed;
But be *thy* brow turned bright on all,
Thy voice like some clear clarion call,
Pealing o'er life's tumultuous van
The keynote of the hopes of man,
While o'er thee flames through gain, through loss,—
That fadeless symbol of the cross![1]

[1] Paul Hamilton Hayne.

The Strength of Joy.

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The Strength of Joy.

The joy of the Lord is your strength.—Neh. viii. 10.

In reading the Holy Scriptures, or hearing them read in the services of the Church, we fail to notice one outstanding feature common both to the Old Testament and to the New, and that is the extraordinary frequency with which we meet with short sentences which arrest our attention, and challenge our admiration alike by the simplicity of the words employed, and by the profundity of the thought expressed. Of no other literature of any age or of any country can this be said in equal degree, and even our oft-quoted poets, with Shakespeare immeasurably the foremost of them all, pale into insignificance before the Bible as the greatest mine that the world has ever known of priceless gems of pregnant and beautiful thought. Such a sentence is the text. It stands out as one of perhaps the first five or six most striking sentences in the whole Bible. Had Nehemiah left us no other message than just this one utterance, his name would still stand high among the great names of the human race, who through the wizardry of felicitous phrase have enriched all succeeding ages by the power of an inspiring thought.

1. Some forty thousand of the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity. They had built their little temple amid the ruins of Jerusalem, and resumed the worship of the Lord's house. But they were few, oppressed, and in great misery. They groaned under the tyranny of the Persian satraps. The neighbouring Samaritans plundered their barns and fields. Their city was as yet undefended by fortified gates, and fell an easy prey to the troops of banditti who scoured the desolate country. "The city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded." They complained in their prayer

that they were slaves in the land given to their fathers. They said, "It yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress." In their distress they turned to Jehovah. They hungered to hear the Divine Law, which many of them had never heard, copies being so scarce with them and life so hard. They met in the street before the Water-Gate; and Ezra, the scribe, brought out the Law and read it to them, and gave them the sense, and caused them to understand the meaning. As they listened, they wept. The contrast between what they had been, and what they were, was too much for them. Once a great nation prospering under the Divine care, they were now a few poor slaves dwelling in a desolate undefended city, tilling a few ravaged fields, withering away, as it seemed, under the Divine curse. They fairly broke down. There was a rain of tears. Their very hearts melted within them.

2. Nehemiah, the brave governor, saw that this was no fit mood for men who had so much to do and to bear. Grief would only unman them. And so he bade the scribe shut his book, and said to the people, "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye grieved; *for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" What he meant was that, if man was against them, God was with them and for them; and that if they were glad and rejoiced in His presence and grace, *that* would be a much better preparation for the hard work they had to do than vainly regretting a past that could not be recalled.

3. It was well that the Jews should look into the awful teachings of the past, and under the clear, stern condemnation of the eternal words give way to the rush of sorrow. But it was not well that they should sorrow long. They had work to do, demanding the strength of joy. The scattered tribes were to be gathered into a nation—the ancient order was to be restored. They were not to mourn over the "irrevocable past," but, learning its lessons, to begin a nobler national life as the people of God. And therefore Nehemiah and the Levites turned the people's

thoughts from the saddening years that were gone, to the heavenly mercy that was shining in the present. "Go your way, . . . this day is holy unto our Lord . . . neither be ye grieved . . . for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

¶ The good counsel of Nehemiah was reinforced by a song from one of their poets or psalmists. It is the brightest and merriest in the Psalter, a true Christian psalm.

O be joyful in Jehovah, all ye lands
  Serve the Lord with gladness,
And come before His presence with a song!
  Be ye sure that Jehovah He is God;
It is He that made us, and not we ourselves;
  We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
O go your way into His gates with thanksgiving,
  And into His courts with praise
Be ye thankful unto Him and speak good of His name;
  For the Lord is gracious; His mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endureth from generation to generation.

I.

God's Joy in Us.

1. Is it fanciful to see in the text first of all a challenge to human love and loyalty—a trumpet-call to live a strong, bright, conquering life because of what that life may mean to God? May we read into the words not only a revelation of the secret of human strength, but also of the source of Divine gladness? In the work of God the Almighty Creator, we hear those words, dear to us from our childhood, which tell us how at the close of the six great æons which formed the successive stages in the stately evolution of the world as a fit habitation for man, "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." Again, we listen to that wonderful creation poem in the Book of Job, which tells us how at the first beginning of all things, "the morning stars sang out together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Surely with such words before us we can realize in some small degree what the "joy of the Lord"—the gladness of the Almighty—must have been when He contemplated the beauty of His perfect handiwork.

¶ Just as a clever craftsman knows the subtle joy of facing and conquering a difficult task, and rejoices over the finished work that owes its being to the cunning of his brain and of his hands—so may we not think of God the Creator as feeling joy over the perfection of His handiwork? And where can that be more fully revealed than in the strength of a strong man or woman, strong in physical energy and endurance, strong in mental equipment, strong in will-power and moral force, inspired by lofty ideals of brotherhood and social service, strong above all in spiritual vision of the unseen but tremendous reality of the higher life of the human soul? "An honest man," we are told, "is the noblest work of God," and when He sees men and women steadfast and immovable—strong and true in their life of self-conquest and self-sacrifice—"standing four-square to every wind that blows"—then I am sure that He rejoices, and that the knowledge brings Him happiness.[1]

2. We are not to suppose for one moment that the infinite wonders of the eternal Godhead raise Him above the sense of joy. We know that there are times of special joy in heaven, and we have no reason to believe that special joy is not shared by God Himself. On the contrary, we know that our Saviour Himself rejoiced when the Seventy returned, and brought Him the glad tidings of their successful ministry; so we are taught of God Himself that the time is coming when He will rejoice over Jerusalem as a bridegroom rejoiceth over a bride (Isa. lxii. 5).

3. Christ is the Christian revelation; the Son and manifestation of God; "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person"; and in Christ we see emphatically that notwithstanding all the misery and shame and conflict of this life—a misery and shame and conflict felt keenly by Him whose very nature is sympathy and whose name is Father—there is in God a deep, abiding, essential joyousness.

4. There cannot be a doubt, therefore, that even in the mind of God there are seasons of peculiar joy; and so, when we are rejoicing in that which rejoices Him, we may be truly said to share the joy of the Lord. When the seducer rejoices in the success of his temptation, his joy is the joy of the devil. When the believer rejoices in the salvation of souls, and the ingathering of God's

[1] Canon Willink.

elect, his joy is the joy of the Lord Jesus. When a soul is saved, there is a great harmony of joy. Men, angels, and God Himself rejoice together, so that the joy of the Church and the joy of angels may be justly termed the joy of the Lord. On the other hand, when there is no deep interest in the conversion of souls, when men do not care whether souls are brought to Christ or not, when missionary intelligence gives them no pleasure, and the work of conversion at home excites no thanksgiving, they may have much to make them happy, but their joy cannot be said to be the joy of the Lord.

Our blessedness to see
Is even to the Deity
A Beatific Vision! He attains
His Ends while we enjoy. In us He reigns.[1]

II.

Our Joy in God.

The main revelation of the text however is this: It is the will of God that we should be happy and strong, inasmuch as it is the joy of the Lord which is our strength.

Let us see (i.) what joy is; (ii.) how we are to gain it; and (iii.) where we are to find occasions for it.

i. What is this joy?

1. There is a broad distinction between mere gladness and spiritual joy. Spiritual joy rises from within the soul, and does not depend on the outward circumstances of life. Men forget this, and fancy that spiritual life is pre-eminently sorrowful, and that joy enervates man. We hear of the cross and the conflict, we are awe-stricken at the sublime demand for the sacrifice of all things, and the noble yet apparently stern picture of the ceaseless struggle of the Christian life. That picture is true, all aspirations begin in sadness, all spiritual aspirations are cradled in tears, all true life is a battle, and the battle of the spiritual man ceases only in heaven. But because this joy springs from the soul and not from circumstances, there is a kind of joy that may deepen

[1] Thomas Traherne.

into blessedness by the bearing of the cross and the endurance of the conflicts of life. From forgetfulness of this truth, there arises the idea that gladness is opposed to the attainment of spiritual power. We see that when God would make a human soul a harp for Divine song, He often baptizes it, as He did David and Isaiah, with difficulties, and smites it with afflictions. We know that when God would make a strong man, He frequently sends him disappointments, imprisonments, desolate days of loneliness, grim battle with slander and care, until the soul grows mighty with the shock, and is clothed with celestial armour by the struggle, and stands up in its strength to fling temptation aside. Hence men conclude that great or lasting joy does not bring out the strength of the soul. It is true that mere gladness —the gladness produced by success and friendship—the buoyant bounding of the heart in life's sunshine—is by no means necessarily strength-giving. It is a blessed and merciful thing. The man into whose life it never comes, and who cannot sometimes give way to its exultation, is to be pitied. Yet if it is perpetual, this does weaken the soul, hides from it the invisible, and withers high purpose in life. But if spiritual joy springs from within the soul, then, so far from loosening the power of the spirit, it girds it for endurance, and it is the joy in difficulty and struggle that makes men strong.

¶ Nehemiah qualifies the statement. He does not say that every joy will make a man strong; his words are, "The joy of the *Lord* is your strength." And he is quite right in this limitation. The joy which strengthens must be unselfish joy. I do not think that joy about personal good fortune is a whit more invigorating to the body than grief for personal loss. They are both weakening. Pope Clement the Seventh died of sorrow for a defeat; but his successor, Leo the Tenth, died of exultation for a victory. Personal excitement, whether through laughter or through tears, paralyses the work of the hour. If in the midst of writing an article you heard that you had come into a great fortune, I do not think you would write a line more that day. But if you heard the same news of one whom you loved, and whose poverty had given you pain, you would be fanned by an inspiration which would make the pen fly. What marks the difference? It is this—the one is the joy of the flesh; the other is the joy of the Lord.[1]

[1] G. Matheson.

2. This spiritual joy is twofold in its nature.

(1) *It is the joy of self-surrender to God.*—Until a man has surrendered himself joy is impossible. There may be gleams of happiness, or wild outbursts of pleasure, but true joy can begin only when the self-life has been surrendered. For men know that to live only in themselves is misery, and yet they cannot escape from themselves, because the consciousness of a guilty past hangs like a burden on the heart.

¶ Look through life, and do you not find that the great aim of men is to forget and go out of themselves? What means the longing to be a child again? What means the gloom only deepened by the flash of pleasure? Whence so often springs the desire

> To die: to sleep;
> No more; and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to?

What means the temptation to suicide? Do not men feel in their inmost hearts that to live in themselves and for themselves—to be bound by the self-life—is misery? For they cannot escape from the guilty self of past years, and dare not face it when it rises from its tomb. Now, emancipation from the tyranny of self, freedom from the memories of the past, is reached by the spiritual man. At the cross of Christ the burden of the past falls, for at the cross he yields himself. There the love of the crucified Lord subdues his nature, and the new Divine life enters, purifying the past, and filling the soul with heavenly energies.

¶ The fact of self-surrender may give rise to a joy that can deepen even in the midst of sorrow, for its secret consists in calm contentedness to be what God wills. Is it not a joy deep and unspeakable to feel we are the willing instruments of the Eternal will; that the Eternal purpose is being wrought out through us? Has not this conviction irradiated the darkness of dungeons, and filled with unspeakable peace the hearts of persecuted and suffering men in all ages? Has it not nerved the martyrs for their last agonies, and strengthened them while the fire of the scaffold did its work? And was it not from this consciousness of fulfilling the will of God that the Great Sufferer gathered strength for His own unspeakable woe, as in the midst of His agony He cried, "Not my will, but thine, be done?"[1]

[1] E. L. Hull.

He touched her hands and the fever left her;
Oh! we need His touch on our fevered hands;
The cool, still touch of the Man of Sorrows,
Who knows us and loves us, and understands.

It may be the fever of pain and anger,
When the wounded spirit is hard to bear,
And only the Lord can draw forth the arrows
Left carelessly, cruelly, rankling there.

Whatever the fever, His touch can heal it,
Whatever the tempest, His voice can still;
There is only joy as we seek His pleasure,
There is only rest as we chose His will.

(2) *It is the joy of fellowship with the Father.*—All profound gladness springs from sympathy with a spirit, or a truth, higher than ourselves. Why do our hearts bound on spring mornings with the joy of nature? Why does the beauty of the summer evening calm us? Why do we feel a glory and a joy as we tread the mountain-sides? Why do we feel a deepening peace as we walk amid the splendours of the golden autumn? Is it not because we realize the presence of a spirit of beauty surrounding us, and inspiring us with an emotion which no words can describe? Or why is it that when a truth breaks in upon us through clouds of doubt, and a clear vision of its beauty is gained after long and fruitless searching, we feel a thrill of joy deep and unspeakable? Have we not, after communion with some greater soul, felt our own darkness dissipated, and our own isolation broken down? In that hour has not the touch of a greater Spirit made us feel nobler, stronger, wiser? And if this is true of earthly communion, must it not be supremely true when we realize the fellowship of God as our Father?

¶ "In all the great sea of ocean," said Serapion, when he had told the story of their wandering, "no such Earthly Paradise have we seen as this dear Abbey of our own!"

"Dear brethren," said the Abbot, "the seven years of your seeking have not been wasted if you have truly learned so much. Far from home I have never gone, but many things have come to me. To be ever, and to be tranquilly, and to be joyously, and to be strenuously, and to be thankfully and humbly at one with the blessed will of God—that is the Heavenly Paradise; and each of

us, by God's grace, may have that within him. And whoso hath within him the Heavenly Paradise hath here and now, and at all times and in every place, the true Earthly Paradise round about him.[1]

ii. How do we obtain this Joy?

1. The joy of the Lord is the *personal gift of God the Holy Ghost* dwelling within the soul. We cannot force ourselves into joy by the power of the most earnest resolution; nor can we argue ourselves or others into joy by the logical application of sound and Scriptural principles. We may have a perfectly correct system of truth, but along with it a joyless heart. It is not a thing which follows necessarily or mechanically from certain principles or certain acts; it is a Divine gift, like life itself, and is the result of the personal work of the Holy Ghost. It is His office "to speak peace unto his people," and to "fill you with all joy and peace in believing." So when David had lost his joy, and was pleading with God for its recovery, he prayed, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice," and, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation: and uphold me with a free spirit."

It is clear from Scripture that a person may lose his joy, though he is not permitted to lose his life. David and Peter both did so; and what was the reason? Was it not that they both grieved the Spirit? They drove the Holy Dove from His resting-place in their hearts; and the true believer may do the same. He may grieve the Spirit by his temper, his evil-speaking, or his want of tenderness; and he may lose all his joy, though God may save him by His marvellous grace.

¶ A little while ago I saw a very sad and sickly-looking plant. It might have been employed as the symbol of melancholy and distress. It was limp and drooping, and had nothing about it suggestive of brightness, buoyancy, and health. I spoke to the gardener about it, and this was the gardener's reply: "That plant, sir, needs three things. It wants better soil, cleaner air, and more light." I was impressed with the comprehensiveness of the counsel. I think the gardener was demanding even more than he himself conceived. For what did he ask? He asked that I should give my plant better soil; that is to say, it wanted a new earth. He asked that I should give it more light; that is to say,

[1] William Canton.

it wanted a new heaven. He asked that I should give it cleaner air; that is to say, it needed a new climate. If my plant were to be brought out of melancholy disease into bright and vigorous health these three conditions would have to be supplied. I should have to take it away from its poor, lean, scanty rootage; I should have to remove it from the polluting gases and vapours by which it was choked; and I should have to release it from the artificial light, or at the best the natural twilight, by which it was imprisoned. A day or two ago I saw another plant, away up on the Warton Hill. This plant enjoyed all the three conditions prescribed by my gardener. It was rooted in luxurious soil, it was steeped and baptized in the uninterrupted light, and it was swept and washed by the unpolluted air. And the plant was the very symbol of joy and strength and health. Its leaves were bright and radiant, and it erected itself as though in conscious triumph. All of which I say is a parable. There are multitudes of souls which are sick and drooping and sad. They are limp and melancholy. There is nothing about them suggestive of radiant joy and victory. How can they be transformed? By the establishment of new conditions. They require a new soil, more light and pure air; that is to say, they need a new earth, a new heaven, and a new climate. And surely it is the "new" things that, above all else, are promised to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. In Jesus Christ we are heirs to the new things; the "new earth" and the "new heaven" are ours in Him.[1]

2. But while the joy of the Lord is ours by the gift of the Holy Ghost, there are means used for conveying and for deepening it. God makes use of *public worship* as a means by which He imparts His joy. How many have come to church burdened and careworn, and gone home from the sanctuary of God refreshed and strengthened. That is what happened to the Psalmist (Ps. lxxiii. 17); and this is exactly what God promised when He said (Isa. lvi. 7), "I will make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called the house of prayer for all people."

3. God makes use of *Holy Scripture* as a means of imparting joy. There can be no real joy that is not founded on Scripture; no other teaching can be the means of imparting abiding peace. Other things may produce excitement, and very lively emotions

[1] J. H. Jowett.

for a time; but it is the Word of God alone that can be the basis of solid joy. This appears very plainly in the words of our Lord Himself and His beloved Apostle. In John xv. 11, He said "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full"; and in 1 John i. 4, St. John appears to echo the words of his Master, and says, "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

4. Finally, if we are to be joyful before the Lord and to serve Him with a pure and constant gladness, we must add to our worship *trust*. The Psalmist warns us that we can be thankful to God and speak good of His Name only as we are sure that He is a gracious God, whose mercy and truth are everlasting, and that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. It is our distrust of Him and of our security in Him that so often gives us mourning for joy, and heaviness of spirit for the garment of praise.

¶ There must be trust before there is joy. This seems so obvious that at first sight we should scarcely consider it worthy of notice; but yet in practical life it requires to be most carefully observed. I have myself met with numbers of persons who have told me that they cannot trust the Lord Jesus Christ because they have no joy in their hearts. This is utterly opposed to Holy Scripture, and indeed to the reason of things. If I may not trust till I have joy, where is the joy to come from? How can any man be rejoicing in safety before he is safe, and before he has learned to trust the Lord Jesus for his safety? How can there be joy in the heart that is doubting Christ? If, therefore, we are to be joyous believers, we must learn to trust when we have no joy at all.[1]

Are you glad, my big brother, my deep-hearted oak?
Are you glad in each open-palm leaf?
Do you joy to be God's? Does it thrill you with living delight?
Are your sturdy in stalwart belief?
As you stand day and night,
As you stand through the nights and the days,
Do you praise?

O strenuous vine, do you run,
As a man runs a race to a goal,

[1] E. Hoare.

Your end that God's will may be done,
Like a strong-sinewed soul?
Are you glad? Do you praise?
Do you run?
And shall I be afraid,
Like a spirit undone;
Like a sprout in deep shade;
Like an infant of days:

When I hear, when I see and interpret aright
The winds in their jubilant flight;
The manifest peace of the sky and the rapture of light;
The pæan of waves as they flow;
The stars that reveal
The deep bliss of the night;
The unspeakable joy of the air;
And feel as I feel,
And know as I know
God is there?

Hush!
For I hear him—
Enshrined in the heart of the wood:
'Tis the priestly and reverent thrush,
Anointed to sing to our God:
And he hymns it full well,
All I stammer to tell,
All I yearn to impart.

Listen!
The strain
Shall sink into the heart,
And soften and swell
Till its meaning is plain,
And love in its manifold harmonies, that shall remain,
Shall remain.[1]

iii. What are the occasions for it?

1. Is there not an occasion for joy in the mere fact of living in a world so wonderful as this of ours, where, as the Psalmist expresses it, everything in His temple cries aloud, "Glory to God!" The study of the open Book of Nature is full of a subtle joy, and no one who reads its pages aright, and understands the

[1] Danske Carolina Dandridge.

joy of bird and beast, and grasps the perfect beauty of every living thing upon the earth, can for one moment doubt that God's intention is surely that gladness and happiness should be the rule of life, and that sorrow and sadness are contrary to His will.

> Let thy day be to thy night
> A letter of good tidings. Let thy praise
> Go up as birds go up, that when they wake
> Shake off the dew and soar. So take Joy home,
> And make a place in thy great heart for her,
> And give her time to grow and cherish her,
> Then will she come and oft will sing to thee
> When thou art working in the furrows, ay,
> Or weeding in the sacred hour of dawn.
> It is a comely fashion to be glad,—
> Joy is the grace we say to God.[1]

All the simple things of nature are joyous; flowers and fruits, woods and streams, the meadows and the breezes, the song of birds, the movements of animals, the irrepressible mirth of children. All the strong things of nature are magnificently joyous. The sun goeth forth "as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race." The sea with its mighty rush and roll, the tempest in its resistless sweep, have the major tone of rejoicing in their roar. The jubilance and triumph of nature are seen in her complex operations. We rejoice in the thunderstorm when we have learnt by how sweet an air, how clear a sky, it will be followed; we rejoice in snow and hail when we know how benignant a mission they fulfil. Pain and death are recorded in the rocks; the soil is eloquent of decay. But in the past ages, when the forgotten creatures lived, there was more pleasure than pain in their living; and their death was as a sacrifice out of which the fuller life of the present has emerged. Decay itself in nature is but the messenger of a nobler vitality; the herald of renewed rejoicing.

2. Think, again, of the deep joy of human comradeship and family affection, and of the countless blessings of our wonderful civilization, which pours out at our very feet the treasures of the

[1] Jean Ingelow, *Dominion*.

whole world. And yet again: did not God intend that the joy of the human intellect—that "kingly mind" of man of which the Greek philosopher tells us—should be a very real one? The joys of literature, of science, of art, and, perhaps beyond all others, the joy of music—are not these most clearly among the plainest evidences of the joy of the Lord?

I saw him across the dingy street,
A little old cobbler, lame, with a hump,
Yet his whistle came to me clear and sweet
As he stitched away at a dancing-pump.

Well, some of us limp while others dance;
There's none of life's pleasures without alloy.
Let us thank Heaven, then, for the chance
To whistle, while mending the shoes of joy.

3. We thank God not only for the joy of our creation and preservation, and of all the blessings of this life, but "above all for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory." Here in the opening of the Kingdom of heaven to all believers; here in the magnificent certainty of our soul's salvation; here in the blessed fact of Christ's sympathy and companionship; in the joy of worship; in the rapture of prayer and of the Holy Communion; here in the anticipation of the unrevealed glory of heaven and of the final victory of light over darkness, of good over evil—here we have the highest proof of all that it is indeed God's will that we should be happy, and as we learn to grasp and realize this great truth, and to build all our hopes for time and for eternity upon His love and faithfulness, we learn, too, to say from the depths of our full hearts, "The joy of the Lord is our strength."

¶ The Jewish system enters into the history of the Christian revelation; a system which was abolished, not because it came not at all from God, or was unworthy of Him, but because in the Gospel its truths have been perfectly revealed, its motives purified and exalted, and its imperfections corrected and supplied. One thing that strikes a careful reader of the Bible is that, in itself and in its application to the men who received it, the Jewish system was in the main a festal, joyous service. We, with our

Christian sympathies and fuller spiritual sensitiveness, read into the Jewish law—as we read into nature—a gloom and heaviness of which its own subjects were scarcely, if at all, conscious. Its restrictions were for the welfare of the people and added comfort to their life; its festivals were more numerous than its fasts; the greater part of its sacrifices were not destroyed as forbidden things, but eaten gratefully and gladly by the worshippers.[1]

Hark! Hark! the joyous lark
  Greets the dewy dawn of May;
Hardly has he time to mark
  The quivering eyelid of the day,
Ere he springs, with fluttering wings,
  In the rapture of the sight;
Ever soaring as he sings,
  Till he lose himself in light.

Heart, heart, how slow thou art
  With thy morning hymn of praise!
Ah! can love no joy impart,
  Though it compass all thy ways?
Why sad amid the glad
  Sunshine which is God's and thine?
O the bliss that may be had,
  Lost in thoughts of love divine!

Why, why sit and sigh,
  Moping o'er thy former sin,
With the gates of glory nigh
  Free for thee to enter in?
O rejoice with heart and voice,
  Like the bird upon the wing;
They who in the Lord rejoice
  Songs of Heaven to earth shall bring.[2]

4. And then, last of all, we find occasions for joy in the spiritual life. Speaking doctrinally, joy is a "fruit of the Spirit," and a direct result of the Gospel. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." God intended to give to the penitent the joy of pardon; to the defiled the joy of holiness; to the feeble the joy of strength. God intended by

[1] A. Mackennal.

[2] Walter C. Smith, *Thoughts and Fancies for Sunday Evenings*, 14.

His promises to lift up our hearts in exultation; and therefore He sent His Son for our acceptance. And Christian history and experience confirm the testimony. It is impossible for any one to study the writings of the Apostle Paul, and not see how buoyant was his spirit. His soul was set in harmony by his faith in Christ, and the joyous impulse fills him. It breaks out in thankful remembrance of his salvation; plays in many a stroke of humour when he makes merry with his infirmities or banters those whom he would wean from follies and prejudices; it lends a glow to his affections, and broadens his heart in world-wide love. And it is ever thus. In proportion as a man has the spirit of Christ's sacrifice, he will anticipate Christ's triumph, and be filled with Christ's joy. Strong Christians are always gladsome men; they find inspiration in their mission, bliss in their work. The voice of rejoicing and thanksgiving is in their tabernacles; they "rejoice in the Lord alway"; they "rejoice with them that do rejoice." And in this they are but manifesting the will of God; giving full play and scope to the spirit of their Father who dwelleth in them.

(1) Joy in the Lord is to be *Christlike*.—And if the joy is Christlike it will move about two things—sublimities and simplicities. Our Lord's joy was found among the sublimities; in communion with the Highest. Those withdrawals from the crowd, those quiet seasons spent upon the mountain-side, those retirements into lonely places were seasons of joyful intercourse with the Father. To have His joy is to share the ecstasy of this communion. But the joy is not only among the sublimities, it is also among the simplicities. What joy the Master found amid lowly things—in home-life, amid congenial friends; in nature-life, amid flowers and birds and streams; in service-life, ministering to the poor and needy. If our joy is to be as the Master's joy, it, too, will shine and flame in spheres of common life.

¶ I met an old man a day or two ago who had spent half a century in the secret place with God. And at the end of fourscore years his joy is as ripe as autumn fruit. "Why, you are quite a marvel," said one of his friends. "No, no; it is my Lord who is the marvel," replied the saint, who has dwelt so long in the holy place.[1]

[1] J. H. Jowett.

(2) Joy in the Lord is *progressive.*—"Your joy shall be fulfilled." Spiritual life is not complete and perfected in a day; it grows from glory unto glory. And joy itself is one of the things which are being ever more richly matured. Each day will fulfil more of its promise and elicit more of its wealth. It is the subject of a ripening ministry which will never be finished.

¶ The law of the universe is *Perfectionation*—that is to say, progression from bad to good, from good to better, and from better to best. And this progression is effected by *activity.* We make the Sabbath the first day of the week—very foolish! It is and was the last day of the week, and is a symbol of enjoyment in work done during the six days that precede, work being the very perfect business and definition of life.[1]

(3) Joy in the Lord is *invulnerable.*—"Your joy no man taketh from you." And this for the simple reason that no man can get at it! It is beyond the reach of human treachery, and is indeed independent of all external circumstances.

¶ I went a little while ago to the old ruined castle at Middleham. I noticed the massive outer walls of extraordinary thickness. I measured the inner walls, which constitute the keep, and in the middle of the keep there was the well. The water supply was quite independent of the invading forces by which the castle in olden days was beset and besieged. The water supply could never be touched. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." Our joy is a well which is in the "keep." "The Lord is thy keeper."[2]

III.

Our Strength.

We know by practical experience that joy is a strength. We know that, while sorrow depresses and unnerves us, joy gives us new heart and vigour. In a cheerful, confident mood we can do that which is quite impossible to us when our strength is wasted in doubt and vain regrets. If we go to any task in a gay, hopeful spirit, we are likely to do it well; while a dejected and fearful heart is only too likely to ensure the failure it anticipates and dreads. But if all joy is strengthening, how

[1] John Stuart Blackie, i. 194. [2] J. H. Jowett.

much more the joy of the Lord! For the joy of the Lord is that serene cheerfulness which springs from an unwavering trust in Him, and which is therefore independent of the changes and losses and griefs of time. If God is our chief good, our supreme joy, as *He* does not change, our joy cannot change. Settled in a perfect trust in Him, we abide in a settled gladness and peace. All tasks are easier to us because we are sure of Him; all losses are endurable because we cannot lose Him; all sorrows may be borne because we are joyful in Him. It is only because God's presence and help, His friendliness and love, His perfect care of us and His joy in our joy, are not real and supreme facts to us, because they are hidden from us by our sins and fears, that we are so often weak and miserable and perturbed.

1. The joy of the Lord is our strength *in the face of temptation.* —If we look back at the past, do we not find that those periods in which we have given way to doubt and distrust were times in which all spiritual energy was paralysed, times in which we longed for some emotion that would raise us above ourselves—longed for "more life and fuller"? Then, in the cold dreary midnight which has seemed to be settling over us, has not the voice whispered, "It is better to go madly wrong than to be passionless and cold"? Then it was that the sleeping evil in the heart started into life, and low impulses and base temptations rose up in power. Now the "joy of the Lord" disarms temptation; it forms in itself the fulness of emotion, and surrounds us with a heavenly atmosphere in which the assaults of evil fall powerless away. It is the vacant heart that is powerless. It must be filled. It is vain to say to a man, "Love not the world," unless you give him something else to love. Thus He who is filled with that calm joy which springs from the surrender of the heart to God, and fellowship with His love, is strong with an irresistible strength.

¶ He swung along the road, happy in heart, singing softly to himself, and thinking about the Saviour. All at once he could feel the fumes coming out of a saloon ahead. He could not see the place yet, but his keen, trained nose felt it. The odours came out strong and gripped him. He said he was frightened, and wondered how he would get by. He had never gone by before, he said, always gone in; but he couldn't go in now. But

what to do, that was the rub. Then he smiled and said, "I remembered, and I said, 'Jesus you'll have to come along and help me get by, I never can by myself.'" And then in his simple, illiterate way he said, "*and He came*—and *we* went by, and we've been going by ever since."[1]

2. The joy of the Lord is our strength *for service.*—No man can do his work well unless his heart is in it; and for a man to put heart into it he must enjoy it; and to enjoy it he must feel that it is congenial—that is to say, the three essential elements of successful service are fitness, enjoyment, enthusiasm. Now, God has a work for all that is in harmony with the best powers of each; a work about which we can say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God"; and a work, therefore, which we can do "with all our might." That work is God's work, the service which engages the energies of the blessed God, which angels rejoice over, and for the joy of completing which the Redeemer endured the cross and despised the shame—the work of rescuing men from sin and making them happy in God's love.

¶ Observe the profound wisdom of Nehemiah's injunction. The distress of the people was not unnatural, neither was it excessive. It might, however, through indulgence in it, have become excessive and unreal. The surest test by which to distinguish between true penitence and spasmodic emotion is to set a man about the common duties of life. If, amid the distractions of these things, he loses his contrition, it is evident that he never was earnestly contrite; that his was mere excited sensibility and not inward feeling. And even a true emotion requires to be directed into wholesome channels. There was hard work for these Jews to do; the whole task of religious reformation lay before them. Their penitence needed to be husbanded for future motive, not wasted in floods of tears and the ecstasy of a common weeping. It may seem strange to us that a cold external commandment should have been the consideration by which they were bidden to self-restraint. But when people have lost their self-control it is only by an external influence that they can be recovered. If we have to do with hysterical persons, it is not along the line of their feeling that we restore them, but by definitely setting ourselves against it; not by sympathizing with their emotion and by words of tenderness, but by the quick sharp rebuke, "Enough of this; you must not give way." We recover the widowed mother to

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Service*, 81.

composure by bidding her, not indeed forget her dead husband, but remember her living children. We bring back stricken mourners to hope and usefulness by reminding them of imperative and healing duty.[1]

¶ There is, no doubt, an element of truth in George Eliot's words, "Many a good piece of work is done with a sad heart," and the lines of Matthew Arnold embody a similar lesson:—

Tasks in hours of insight willed
May be in hours of gloom fulfilled.

Still, as a general rule, it will be found that there is nothing more unfavourable to efficient or successful work than despondency or sadness. A joyless workman is seldom a good workman; he does not work vigorously, he has no pleasure in his work, and consequently he is very likely to tire of it. Joy is the source of strength. Gladness is the secret of efficiency. Light-heartedness makes work easy. If our spirits begin to flag, we shall not conquer difficulties. If we lose heart, we shall win no victories. "If the arm is to smite with vigour," says Dr. Maclaren, "it must smite at the bidding of a calm and light heart."

Now with no care or fear,
Because I feel Thee near,
Because my hands were not reached out in vain,
I may from out my calm
Reach humbly out some balm,
Some peace, some light to others in their pain.

3. The joy of the Lord is our strength *for endurance*.—We are too weak to endure the discipline of life unless we have the present earnest of the future reward. Sorrows make us strong by breaking us away from the enervating influences of the world's life; but stronger for endurance is this joy which springs out of sorrow. It was this joy that shone out in the martyr ages, and filled the martyrs' souls with the peace of God, and it is the earnest and foretaste now of the blessedness of those who, being faithful to the end, shall fully "enter into the joy of their Lord."

¶ Learn to live with the contentment of those who have already found their portion, who see their way now through eternity. And at each step of your way, when things are very dark with you and the light has died off from all you took pleasure

[1] A. Mackennal.

in, when men are wondering how they can speak a word of comfort to you, you can still say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage!" You are determined to read all God's dealings with you in the light of His prime gift; and you know well enough that the want of some things is a part of the "all things" that God bestows. You can, each one of you, go to God now and say with a confidence no creature can challenge, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."[1]

Waiting on Him who knows us and our need,
Most need have we to dare not, nor desire,
But as He giveth, *softly* to suspire
Against His gift, with no inglorious greed,
For this is joy, tho' still our joys recede;
And, as in octaves of a noble lyre,
To move our minds with His, and clearer, higher,
Sound forth our fate; for this is strength indeed.

Thanks to His love let earth and man dispense
In smoke of worship when the heart is stillest,
A praying more than prayer: "Great good have I,
Till it be greater good to lay it by;
Nor can I lose peace, power, permanence,
For these smile on me from the thing Thou willest!"[2]

[1] Marcus Dods. [2] Frank Dempster Sherman.

OPPORTUNITY.

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OPPORTUNITY.

If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?—Esth. iv. 14.

1. THE story is too familiar to need much retailing. Haman, the favourite minister of Ahasuerus, entertained a malignant hatred against the Jews, because one of their number, Mordecai, refused to do him reverence as he passed him daily at the gate of the palace. He promised that if the Jews were handed over to him for destruction, ten talents should be paid into the treasury. The king agreed to his favourite's demand, and orders were sent out to the governors who were over provinces, and to the princes of every people, "to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women."

¶ It is always interesting, when possible, to set sacred history by the side of profane, and identify, if we can, the great actors in both. Considerable discussion has taken place with regard to the king who is here called Ahasuerus, as the chief point in enabling us to fix the probable date of the marvellous events which are narrated. There was a succession of powerful monarchs in Persia at the time about which these events occurred; and of these, two are mentioned by critical scholars as being, the one or the other of them, undoubtedly the ruler mentioned here. Ezra speaks of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, and some incline to the opinion that it is the same man who appears in the Book of Esther under the name Ahasuerus. Seeing, however, that this king must have been unnaturally inconsistent when the edict against the Jews was sent out, since he had just before granted them large favours, and remembering that several historians speak of him as having had a Jewish mother, it seems far more probable to identify Ahasuerus with the preceding king, Xerxes, the great invader of Greece, the son of Darius, whom the Athenians so nobly met and conquered at Marathon.

2. Esther was queen. Vashti, who would not degrade herself by obeying the king's drunken commands, had been deposed. Esther was queen, and Esther was a Jewess. Her life, therefore, was likely to be sacrificed with the rest. Her kinsman, Mordecai, who seems to have preserved his faith in God through all the enervating influences of this Persian court, saw that the only hope of escape was in Esther.

3. So complete was the retirement of the women in the recesses of the harem, that the queen knew nothing of the calamity which was impending over her people. Mordecai for nine years had abstained from all communication with her lest her position might be compromised, and she should be identified, to her detriment, with her despised people. Now, however, it was peremptory that he should break through the reserve, and he therefore sent a message to the queen informing her of the plot that was on foot, and asking her to go in to the king to make supplication and request before him for her people.

4. Our text contains the argument which Mordecai used to induce Esther to undertake the hazardous duty. It is an argument which has a very wide application. Let us consider it under four statements—

I. We may fail in our duty by simply being silent.
II. If we fail, God gets His work done in some other way.
III. But we suffer for it.
IV. Every opportunity is a call.

I.

We may fail in our Duty by simply being Silent.

"If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time."

1. Esther was very likely tempted to be silent at a time when to speak was necessary to save her countrymen from destruction. We often bite our tongues because we have sinned in speech, but how often have we sinned by silence. For there is a silence that is sinful: "If he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity."

It may be that a great cause is in danger. Its advocates and its opponents are pretty evenly balanced. But there is one strong man, who, if he would speak, could turn the fortunes of the day;

for men believe in his sincerity and disinterestedness, as well as in his knowledge and insight; and the humbler supporters of the cause are waiting, in hope, to hear what he will say. His gifts, his influence, his experience, not only qualify but entitle him to speak a great word. But he sits in silence, or makes a speech of unworthy compromise. He lets the golden opportunity pass; and it may be that a great injustice is done, or the cause of truth and progress is retarded for years, for want of the word which he could well have spoken.

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

We shall march prospering,—not thro' his presence;
Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire;
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more triumph for devils and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him,—strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in Heaven, the first by the throne![1]

[1] Browning, *The Lost Leader*.

2. There are many reasons for silence. Sometimes it is due to real and all but unconquerable diffidence, sometimes to cynicism, but sometimes also assuredly to cowardice. The man may suppose that plain, uncompromising speech might alienate his friends, imperil his influence, or injure his reputation. In any case, the day on which a strong and influential man fails, for such a reason, to lift up his voice for the truth is one of the tragic days of his life. In the Providence of God, that was the crisis for which he had come to his kingdom, and he should have bravely met it.

(1) The silence to which Esther was tempted was the silence of *expediency.* She knew how greatly the Jews needed relief and deliverance, but she feared lest if she spoke in their behalf her own position might be compromised. It is astonishing how many Christians can preserve a prudential silence when an evil demands denunciation. They are anxious for their own peace. They are slaves of expediency. We need to remember George Meredith's grand words, "Expediency is man's wisdom, doing right is God's."

¶ The editorial declaration in a popular New York daily paper, that a newspaper's chief concern should be with whatever will give it a circulation, was merely the brazen statement of what has become with many the real philosophy of life. It is the substitution of expediency for honesty.[1]

(2) Esther was tempted to the silence of *selfishness.* True, her people were imperilled, but she was happy and free! She had newly come to the throne. The glamour of royalty was upon her. Shall she run the risk of losing her delights? By silence she may have permanent pleasure. This type of silence is very common, and we are often tempted to it. We dread to speak lest our ease and enjoyment should suffer thereby. It is the acute remark of one of our present-day writers, that "times of great trouble often reveal the meanness of human nature." Nothing is meaner than to be silent in presence of wrong for the sake of selfish comfort. Bishop Thorold spoke of people being "buried in self-love." What a dreadful tomb!

¶ No one enters into the life of Christ's discipleship who does not seek, not the renunciation only, but the very death of all his old low self and self-life. For life is far more than just ease

[1] J. I. Vance, *Tendency*, 125.

and gentleness, far more than confession and the endurance of the tests that God sends us. Life is a daily dying and rising—as the old lines run :—

> As once toward heaven my face was set,
> I came unto a place where two ways met.
> One led to Paradise and one away;
> And fearful of myself lest I should stray,
> I paused that I might know
> Which was the way wherein I ought to go.
> The first was one my weary eyes to please,
> Winding along thro' pleasant fields of ease,
> Beneath the shadow of fair branching trees.
> "This path of calm and solitude
> Surely must lead to heaven," I cried,
> In joyous mood.
> "Yon rugged one, so rough for weary feet,
> The footpath of the world's too busy street,
> Can never be the narrow way of life."
> But at that moment I thereon espied
> A footprint bearing trace of having bled,
> And knew it for the Christ's, so bowed my head,
> And followed where He led.

(3) Esther was tempted to the silence of *slothfulness*. To speak for the relief and deliverance of the Jews would involve strenuous endeavour. She feared to trample on her ease. Are we not all so tempted? To serve the needy age is to forswear ease. Every great helper of the world has to cry, "Virtue is gone out of me." And we shrink from such self-depletion.

¶ Very wonderful is the intimate connection, the subtle interaction, between the forces of our physical and our moral nature. It is one of the chief mysteries of our mysterious being. But it is not a mystery merely; it is a fact of infinite practical significance which cannot be ignored without grave peril. The intelligent recognition of it would save many good people from much sorrow, as it would save others from grievous sin.

¶ The moral degradation which comes from physical indolence is difficult to define. Most of us may thank God that the very circumstances of our life keep us safe from this sin. Few men can help working; most men have to work hard. But sluggishness, an indisposition to make any exertion unless compelled to

make it, is sometimes to be met with even in this restless and active age, and in every social condition.[1]

¶ During the formation of one of the lines of railway through the Highlands, a man came to the contractor and asked for a job at the works, when the following conversation took place :—

"Well, Donald, you've come for work, have you? and what can you do?"

"Deed, I can do onything."

"Well, there's some spade and barrow work going on; you can begin on that."

"Ach, but I wadna just like to be workin' wi a spade and a wheelbarrow."

"O, would you not? Then yonder's some rock that needs to be broken away. Can you wield a pick?"

"I wass never usin' a pick, whatefer."

"Well, my man, I don't know anything I can give you to do."

So Donald went away crestfallen. But being of an observing turn of mind, he walked along the rails, noting the work of each gang of labourers, until he came to a signal-box, wherein he saw a man seated, who came out now and then, waved a flag, and then resumed his seat. This appeared to Donald to be an occupation entirely after his own heart. He made enquiry of the man, ascertained his hours and his rate of pay, and returned to the contractor, who, when he saw him, good-naturedly asked:

"What, back again, Donald? Have you found out what you can do?"

"Deed, I have, sir. I would just like to get auchteen shullins a week, and to do that," holding out his arm and gently waving the stick he had in his hand.[2]

II.

If We fail God gets His Work done in some other Way.

"Then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place."

1. Mordecai had evidently drunk deeply of the spirit of the history of Israel. Israel was the people of God; the possessor of the promises of God, which had not reached their fulfilment; and

[1] R. W. Dale.

[2] Sir A. Geikie, *Scottish Reminiscences*, 24.

sooner could the pillars of the heavens fall than these be broken. Mordecai believed that God watched over Israel night and day; many a time had He delivered her, when everything appeared desperate and the help of man had utterly failed; and the record of God's faithfulness in the past gave the assurance that in some way of His own He would prevent the extinction of His people.

2. There is wonderful encouragement in Mordecai's message. Somehow God's great delivering work shall be done! We cannot see how, but it shall yet be. All things are possible to omnipotence. Relief and deliverance shall arise from another place. Incapacitated workers may be comforted by this assurance. The work shall not finally suffer through a particular worker's disablement.

3. The passage admits of easy application to the Church. One portion of the Church may fail to rise to the height of its duty and, in spite of all the splendid hopes which it enshrines, it may perish. But not so the whole Church, or even the particular purpose which that portion was meant to have fulfilled. Relief and deliverance shall arise to the Church from another place. Men of another sort can be raised up to do the work which we neglected to do.

4. Relief and deliverance shall arise from another place. So it is certain that God from eternity has willed that all flesh should see His salvation. He loves the heathen better than we do. Christ has died not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. God has made of one blood all nations of men. The race is one in its need. The race is one in its goal. The Gospel is fit for all men. The Gospel is preached to all men. The Gospel shall yet be received by a world, and from every corner of a believing earth will rise one roll of praise to one Father, and the race shall be one in its hopes, one in its Lord, one in faith, one in baptism, one in one God and Father of us all. That grand unity shall certainly come. That true unity and fraternity shall be realized. The blissful wave of the knowledge of the Lord shall cover and hide and flow rejoicingly over all national distinctions. "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth." This is as certain

as the efficacy of a Saviour's blood can make it, as certain as the universal adaptation and design of a preached Gospel can make it, as certain as the oneness of human nature can make it, as certain as the power of a Comforter who shall convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment can make it, as certain as the misery of man can make it, as certain as the promises of God who cannot lie can make it, as certain as His faithfulness who hangs the rainbow in the heavens and enters into an everlasting covenant with all the earth can make it.

This I beheld, or dreamed it in a dream:—
There spread a cloud of dust along a plain;
And underneath the cloud, or in it, raged
A furious battle, and men yelled, and swords
Shocked upon swords and shields. A prince's banner
Wavered, then staggered backward, hemmed by foes.
A craven hung along the battle's edge,
And thought, "Had I a sword of keener steel—
That blue blade that the king's son bears,—but this
Blunt thing!"—he snapt and flung it from his hand,
And lowering crept away and left the field.

Then came the king's son, wounded, sore bestead,
And weaponless, and saw the broken sword,
Hilt-buried in the dry and trodden sand,
And ran and snatched it, and with battle-shout
Lifted afresh he hewed his enemy down,
And saved a great cause that heroic day.[1]

III.

But We shall suffer for It.

"Thou and thy father's house shall perish."

1. Mordecai's precise reference is not absolutely certain: probably he foretells that if the Jews are massacred Esther's Jewish origin will be discovered, and she and her father's house will share the extermination; or it may be that he merely predicts some indefinite though certain Nemesis.

[1] Edward Rowland Sill.

2. Mordecai's principle is for ever true: retribution must ensue upon negligence. We cannot save our lives without at length losing them: they are "destroyed" who leave their duty undone. We need neither define nor describe the destruction. Sometimes it occurs in this life; at times it takes the form of the overthrow of our temporal possessions; oftener far it manifests itself in open deterioration of character. But God has a hell of fire for the negligent even on this side the veil.

¶ I know not what of evil may yet come of the negligence of the Christian Church towards the population with which it is surrounded. Those wretched beings who starve in over-crowded rooms will not die unavenged, if nothing more comes of it than the sin which is begotten of want. If you live in a house well-ventilated and well-drained, and you have near you hovels foul, filthy, dilapidated, over-crowded, when the fever breeds there it will not respect your garden wall; it will come up into your windows, smite down your children, or lay you yourself in the grave. As such mischief to health cannot be confined to the locality in which it was born, so is it with spiritual and moral disease; it must and will spread on all sides. This may be a selfish argument; but as we are battling with selfishness, we may fitly take Goliath's sword with which to cut off his head. You Christian people suffer if the Church suffers; you suffer even if the world suffers. If you are not creating a holy warmth, the chill of sin is freezing you. Unconsciously the death which is all around will creep over you who are idle in the Church, and it will soon paralyse all your energies unless in the name of God you rouse yourself to give battle to it. You must unite with the Lord and His people in winning the victory over sin, or sin will win the victory over you.[1]

3. We cannot hold back from Christ's cause with impunity. It can do without us, but we cannot do without it. "Whosoever will save his life," said our Lord, "shall lose it." If religion is a reality, to live without it is to suppress and ultimately to destroy the most sacred portion of our own being. It is a kind of suicide, or at least a mutilation. If it is possible for man to enjoy in this life intimacy and fellowship with God, then to live without God is to renounce the profoundest and most influential experience which life contains. If Jesus Christ is the central figure in history, and if the movement which He

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

set agoing is the central current of history, then to be dissociated from His aims is to be a cipher, or perhaps even a minus quantity, in the sum of good. It may, indeed, in the meantime facilitate our own pleasure, and it may clear the way for the pursuit of our personal ambitions; but when we look back on our career from the end of life, will it satisfy us to remember the number of pleasant sensations we have had, if we have to confess to ourselves that we are dying without having contributed anything to the real progress of mankind and without ever having seen the real glory of the world?

> Not once or twice in our rough island-story,
> The path of duty was the way to glory:
> He that walks it, only thirsting
> For the right, and learns to deaden
> Love of self, before his journey closes,
> He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting
> Into glossy purples, which outredden
> All voluptuous garden roses.
>
> Not once or twice in our fair island-story,
> The path of duty was the way to glory:
> He, that ever following her commands,
> On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
> Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won
> His path upward, and prevail'd,
> Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled
> Are close upon the shining table-lands
> To which our God Himself is moon and sun.[1]

IV.

Every Opportunity is a Special Call.

"Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

1. Mordecai sees the exigency of the time. He sees something more. He believes in an over-ruling Providence. He has watched the gradual grouping of events, and knows they have not come by chance. A little while ago it might have

[1] Tennyson, *The Duke of Wellington.*

struck him as strange that a Jewess should sit upon the Persian throne; but now he understands it. One higher than Ahasuerus circled with the coronet Esther's brow; One who does nothing without a meaning and an end. The man, in his high-souled faith, reads God's reason, and understands why Esther has been exalted. "She has come to the kingdom for such a time as this." The life of thousands is placed in her hands. Now she has an opportunity of accomplishing her Divine destiny, and shall she not be equal to the occasion?

¶ These words instantly lit the whole career of Esther with a new and solemn meaning. It was, then, not for nothing that she was queen, and it was not an accident that had set her upon the throne. This was the crisis to which, throughout the brilliant, happy years, she had all unconsciously been borne; and now she was to prove to the world whether she was a queen in name only or also in deed and truth. The honour of queen she had enjoyed; the higher honour of the heroine she had yet to achieve. The appeal of Mordecai flashed a light upon her destiny. In a moment she saw the drift of the past, the meaning of the present, the vastness of the opportunity; and she swiftly made up her mind. "I will go," she said. "Let all the Jews fast for me; and, though it is against the law, I will appear before the king; and if I perish, I perish."[1]

2. God's providential purpose; man's present opportunity: that is how we are to read the lesson of this marvellous history. A purpose clearly written on the face of events, and to be readily deciphered from their grouping; but still so written that men must open their eyes if they would see it, and open their heart if they would understand it. In former days, when the people were hurrying from their bondage, when they stood in danger, with a sea in front, and an army behind, a Voice spoke bidding Moses stretch his rod over the sea, that a way might be made for the ransomed to pass over. Now we have no voice, but circumstances gather about us; the rod is thrust into our hand, and we miss our deliverance if we do not see that we must wave the rod. In olden time Moses was bidden strike the rock, and water gushed forth. Now we see the thirsting multitudes, and again the rod is put in our grasp. There comes no water if we do not see that we must strike. We are not in intellectual and religious infancy. We

[1] J. E. M'Fadyen.

ought to be able to discover without any warning voice what God s purpose is, and what our opportunity is worth.

> There is a tide in the affairs of men,
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
> On such a full sea are we now afloat;
> And we must take the current when it serves,
> Or lose our ventures.

¶ There is nothing that stands still in time, so that no duty at all admits of delay; each is strictly the duty of the moment. The act of social kindness, which is a gracious attention this week, becomes an overdue debt the next, and is presented with sad apology instead of being received with glad surprise. The wounded tenderness to which we spoke not the timely and soothing word, passes into permanent soreness instead of healing with grateful love. All round our human existence, indeed, does this same thing appear. Each present conviction, each secret suggestion of duty, constitutes a distinct and separate call of God, which can never be slighted without the certainty of its total departure or its fainter return. Our true opportunities come but once; they are sufficient but not redundant; we have time enough for the longest duty, but not for the shortest sin.[1]

> Farewell, fair day and fading light!
> The clay-born here, with westward sight,
> Marks the huge sun now downward soar.
> Farewell. We twain shall meet no more.
>
> Farewell. I watch with bursting sigh
> My late contemned occasion die.
> I linger useless in my tent:
> Farewell, fair day, so foully spent!
>
> Farewell, fair day. If any God
> At all consider this poor clod,
> He who the fair occasion sent
> Prepared and placed the impediment.
>
> Let him diviner vengeance take—
> Give me to sleep, give me to wake
> Girded and shod, and bid me play
> The hero in the coming day![2]

[1] James Martineau.

[2] R. L. Stevenson, *Songs of Travel.*

(1) *Life is an opportunity.*—It is coming to our kingdom. To live physically, intellectually, spiritually, to exist, is our call. Do we understand the wonderful possibilities of our life? Often it drops down into a dull routine, monotonous, mechanical. We seem to be within the grasp of a savage power, which puts us here and there, forcing us through daily exercises of one sort and another in a way over which we seem to have no control. But it is possible to have this seeming iron destiny placed under the control of a still higher Power.

¶ Our days have fallen on a time different from all that has gone before, unique in this particular, if in nothing else—the power of public opinion. In former days, only one man here and there seemed to have a kingdom to enter upon, a few men swayed the nations, a few men seemed to be inspired to deeds which raised them into leaders of the people. But now the rulers in name are the ruled in fact. The government is governed, and the people, as freedom has broadened slowly down from precedent to precedent, control everything. It is a great thing to live now. Are we equal to the occasion? We may know much. Literature pours its wealth out before us. Science teaches us how to look away into space, and follow the stars in their girdling orbits; to look down into little things, and see how great a world of being exists in points and specks which our eye can scarcely discern. It tells us how the earth is made, and reads off to us the story of its framing. Are we equal to our time?

We need it every hour—
A purpose high,
To give us strength and power
To do or die.
We need it every hour—
A firm, brave will,
That, though hate's clouds may lower,
Shall conquer still.

We need it every hour—
A calm strong mind,
Enriched by reason's dower,
Nor warped nor blind.
We need it every hour—
A patient love,
Which shall all souls endower
From heights above.

We need it every hour—
A conscience clear,
That shall be as a tower
Of strength and cheer.
We need it every hour—
A true pure life,
Which failure cannot sour
Or turn to strife.[1]

(2) *Christian life is an opportunity.*—As Christians we have come to a kingdom. Shall we prove ourselves equal to the times on which our lot has fallen? Christianity, ever since its birth, has presented two aspects—the offensive and the defensive, self-assertion and aggression. At the building of the wall round Jerusalem men worked with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other, watchful to resist attack, watchful that the work should make progress. So has the new spiritual Jerusalem been built, from the time of the early Fathers of the Church down to the latest contributors to Christian apology, from the time of St. Paul the Apostle down to the latest heroes of missionary enterprise.

¶ No time is without its own pathos and its call for patriotic and self-sacrificing work. Certainly ours is not. The wonderful progress of science in the last two generations has supplied means of helping the world such as have never existed before. The problem of the degraded and disinherited is pressing on the attention of intelligent minds with an urgency which cannot be disregarded. It is intolerable to think that a noble population like ours should forever lie sodden and stupefied, as it now does, beneath a curse like drunkenness; and events are rapidly maturing for a great change. The heathen world is opening everywhere to the influences of the Gospel. And perhaps the most significant of all the signs of the times is the conviction, which is spreading in many different sections of the community, that the average of Christian living is miserably below the standard of the New Testament, and that a far broader, manlier, more courageous and open-eyed style of Christianity is both possible and necessary.[2]

[1] Sara A. Underwood. [2] J. Stalker.

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